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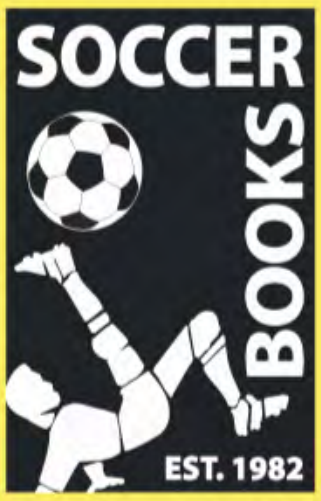

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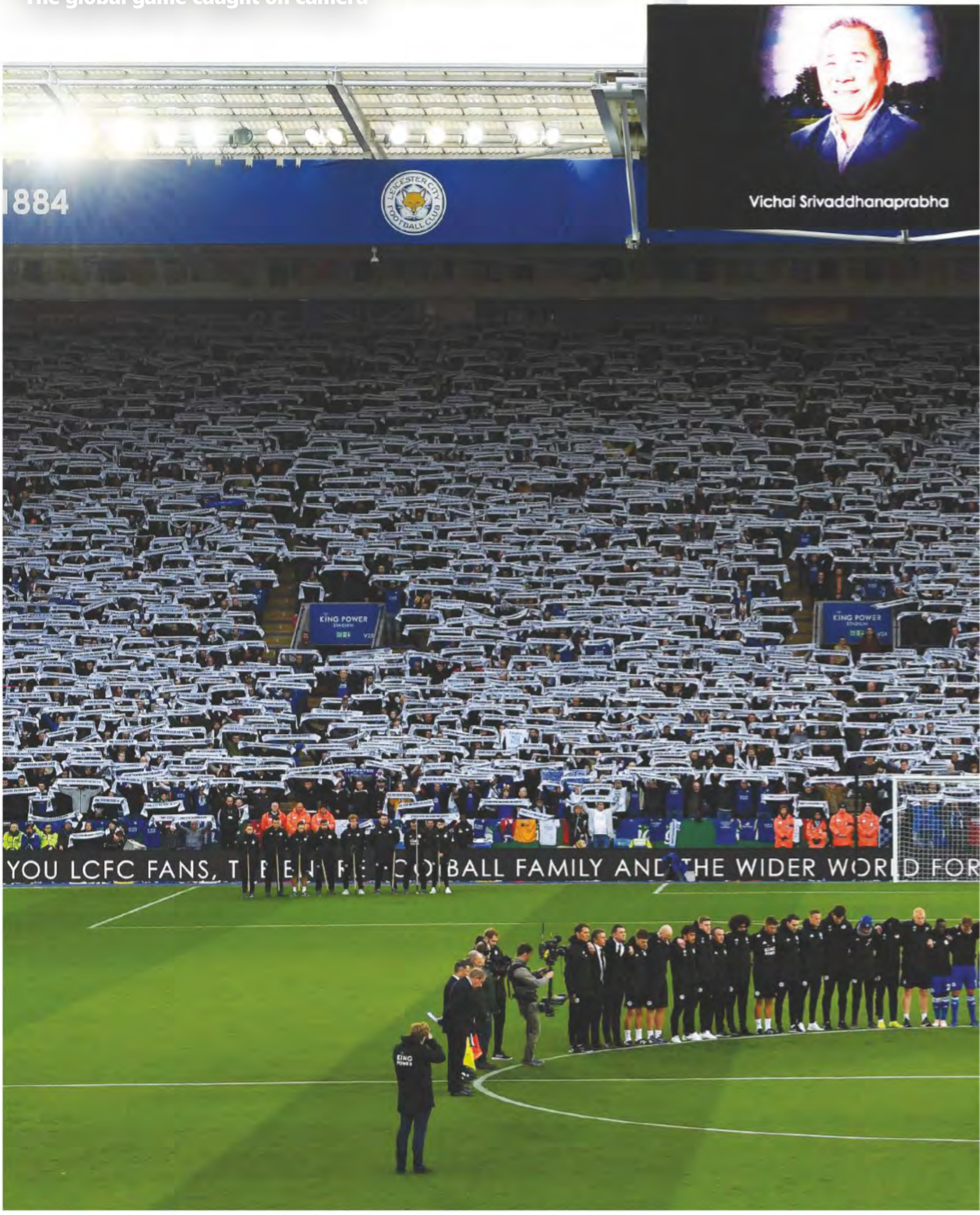
The global game caught on camera



Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha

ENGLAND...the football world was stunned when Leicester City owner Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha and four other people were killed when the helicopter they were in crashed outside the King Power Stadium following the Premier League game against West Ham United. Two weeks later, and before their next home match, Leicester players and club officials, along with the Burnley team, stand for a two-minute silence in memory of the man known affectionately as Khun Vichai

CHINA...Paulinho and Guangzhou Evergrande substitutes celebrate a goal against Chinese champions Shanghai SIPG

SPAIN...Moumi Ngamaleu of Swiss side Young Boys reacts during his club's Champions League match at Valencia

ARGENTINA...Boca Juniors fans cheer their team before the first leg of the Libertadores Cup Final against River Plate at La Bombonera

TURKEY...Galatasaray attack the Fenerbahce defence during an ill-tempered Istanbul derby

SERBIA...Milan Pavkov with Red Star fans after their Champions League win against Liverpool in Belgrade

GERMANY...Bochum's Robert Tesche celebrates after scoring against Jahn Regensburg

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FROM THE EDITOR

Unfortunately there have been plenty of reminders this month of the ugly side of the beautiful game. Amid all the talk of European Super Leagues, offshore bank accounts and multi-million bonuses for Premier League bosses, the Libertadores Cup Final between River Plate and Boca Juniors should have provided a timely reminder of everything that is good about the game.

Instead, the violence that has plagued Argentinian club football forced the abandonment of what should have been a thrilling spectacle. What's more, the game was called off amid talk of a replay in Abu Dhabi ahead of the Club World Cup.

The growing influence of middle eastern countries UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia is a phenomenon which is troubling to say the least.

> The growing influence of middle eastern countries UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia is troubling to say the least

The recent Football Leaks revelations (page 42) have highlighted some of the ways that football is in danger of being corrupted by nation states trying to launder their reputations through sport.

It is easy to be dazzled by the football played by Pep Guardiola's teams but sometimes we need to delve deeper and examine the darker side of the game.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 Libertadores Cup Final abandoned p28
2 Club World Cup kicks off in Abu Dhabi p10
3 Holland, England, Switzerland comebacks in Nations League p72
4 Germany relegated from Nations League top tier p72
5 Santiago Solari appointed full-time Real Madrid coach p34
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8 Kashima Antlers triumph in AFC Champions League Final p66
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10 Martino set to take charge of Mexico p40

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Club World Cup confusion after Libertadores abandonment

Following the abandonment of the Libertadores Cup Final second leg between River Plate and Boca Juniors, confusion surrounded the identity of the representative from South America in December's Club World Cup in Abu Dhabi.

As *World Soccer* went to press, a date had yet to be set for the rescheduled match, with some officials from South America's governing body CONMEBOL suggesting the game could be played in United Arab Emirates, with the winner staying on in the country to compete as South America's representative.

The competition is being held in UAE for the second successive year, having previously been held in the country in 2009 and 2010.

Holders Real Madrid, who are bidding for a third successful title, are set to enter at the semi-final stage.

"Infantino [of FIFA] and Dominguez [of CONMEBOL] are worse than rats, they care more about money than the lives of Boca Juniors players"

Former Paraguay goalkeeper Jose Chilavert criticised the authorities after the abandonment of the Libertadores Cup Final

First leg...River Plates's Rafael Santos Borre (left) holds off Lucas Olaza of Boca Juniors

CLUB WORLD CUP DRAW

PLAY-OFF (match 1)
Dec 12 Al-Ain (hosts) v Team Wellington (Oceania) (Al Ain)

QUARTER-FINALS (matches 2 & 3)
Dec 15 Esperance (Africa) v winners match 1 (Al Ain)
Dec 15 Kashima Antlers (Asia) v Guadalajara (CONCACAF) (Al Ain)

5TH/6TH-PLACE PLAY-OFF
Dec 18 loser match 2 v loser match 3 (Al Ain)

SEMI-FINALS
Dec 18 CONMEBOL v winner match 2 (Al Ain)
Dec 18 winner match 3 v Real Madrid (Europe) (Abu Dhabi)

FINAL/3RD-PLACE PLAY-OFF
Dec 22 (Abu Dhabi)

HEROES & VILLAINS

DIDIER DROBGA

The former Chelsea and Ivory Coast forward retired aged 40 after playing his last game for Phoenix Rising, the United Soccer League club which he owns.

Retirement...Drogba

HARIS SEFEROVIC

The Benfica striker, criticised for his profligacy at major tournaments, scored a hat-trick in Switzerland's dramatic 5-2 victory over Belgium in the Nations League.

WAYNE ROONEY

The former Everton and Manchester United star won his 120th and final cap for England after appearing as a substitute in the friendly against USA at Wembley.

VIRGIL VAN DIJK

The Holland captain, who scored a late goal away to Germany to ensure qualification for the Nations League knockout stage, consoled Romanian referee Ovidiu Hategan at the final whistle, after he was made aware that the official's mother had died.

"That man broke down, stood with tears in his eyes because he had just lost his mother," Van Dijk said. "I wished him strength and said he had refereed well. It's a small thing, but I hope it helped him."

Gesture...Van Dijk with referee Hategan

NICKLAS BENDTNER

The Rosenborg and ex-Arsenal striker was sentenced to 50 days in jail in Denmark for assaulting a taxi driver.

Prison sentence...Niklas Bendtner

ANJORIN MOUCHARAFOU

The former federation president of Benin's federation was handed a prison sentence for age cheating. Benin were disqualified from the regional qualifying tournament in Niger for the 2019 Under-17 African Nations Cup after players failed MRI tests.

Moucharafou, who was president at the time of the tests, received a 12-month prison sentence, with 10 months suspended.

The national under-17 team coach Lafiou Yessoufof and two other officials received similar sentences for their roles in the cheating.

ROBERTO SOLDADO

The Spaniard was one of three players sent off following a brawl in the Istanbul derby between Galatasaray and Fenerbahce. The match ended in a 2-2 draw and Soldado received a six-match ban.

Fenerbahce's Jailson Siqueira received an eight-match ban and Galatasaray's Badou Ndiaye five matches, while Galatasaray coach Faith Terim received a seven-match ban for insulting the referee.

Red card...Soldado (left)

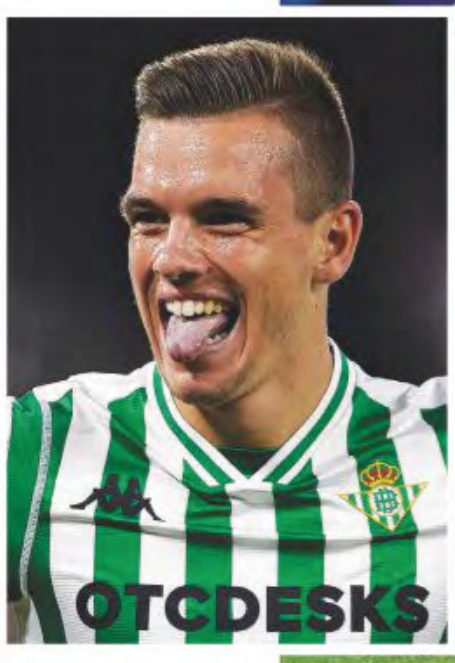
JANG HYUN-SOO

The 27-year-old South Korea defender, who has won 58 caps for his country, was banned from playing for the national team for life after he faked community service records in order to avoid military service.

"N'Golo is inflexible, he simply wants a normal salary"

The accountant for N'Golo Kante explains that the Chelsea midfielder does not want fees for his image rights to be paid into an offshore account

Giovani LO CELSO (Real Betis)



It's not often that Lionel Messi is the second best Argentinian on the pitch. But the Barcelona star was outshone by the central midfielder in Betis' recent 4-3 win in La Liga – the first victory for the Seville club at Camp Nou since 1998.

Outstanding for the Spanish club this season, the 22-year-old is finally realising his potential on a European stage after a move from Rosario Central to Paris Saint-Germain in 2016.

Not in the plans of incoming PSG boss Thomas Tuchel, who has since deployed defender Marquinhos in central midfield, Lo Celso was also unused by Argentina coach Jorge Sampaoli at the World Cup in Russia.

However, a season-long loan move to Betis has given the player the opportunity to display his talents on a regular basis and the forward-thinking tactics of coach Quique Setien have certainly helped that process.

He is under contract to PSG until 2021 but Betis have an option to buy at the end of this season.

Fernando OVELAR (Cerro Porteno)
The youngster scored the opening goal in Paraguay's biggest club match – Cerro Porteno v Olimpia – aged just 14 years, nine months and 29 days.

Alassane PLEA (B Monchengladbach)
With 11 goals in 12 games for Gladbach since his summer move from Ligue 1 side Nice, the attacker's form was recognised with a call-up to the France squad for the first time.

Andre-Pierre GIGNAC (Tigres)
The veteran forward continues to bang in the goals in Mexico, scoring four in one recent game against Puebla.

Sebastien HALLER (E Frankfurt)
The big French striker, who moved to Germany from Dutch side Utrecht in May 2017, scored eight goals and provided assists in his first 11 Bundesliga games for Eintracht.

Nicolas PEPE (Lille)
The 23-year-old striker has been one of the revelations of the Ligue 1 season for surprise challengers Lille.

Mario HERMOSO (Espanyol)
The centre-back's form for Liga surprise package Espanyol was recognised by Spain coach Luis Enrique who called him into the senior squad.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

English managers: missing, presumed extinct

Has the decline and fall of the English football manager reached its nadir? We can but hope so for a much-maligned species of the world's favourite sport.

It is a shameful reality that the Premier League has never been won by an English manager in 26 years of existence – and certainly won't be this season.

Even more damning, surely, is the fact that only four of the 20 bosses in England's top division are English, with two of that quartet now veterans past their 70th birthday.

Compare this to the Bundesliga, where 14 of the 18 coaches are German. The figure for locals is 18 out of 20 in Serie A, in France it is 17 out of 20 in Ligue 1, while 15 of La Liga's 20 top men are Spanish.

This is how it should be: some outside influence and inspiration but with the majority promoted from within a nation's own game.

So why are the statistics so grim in England? There are myriad explanations, including the high percentage of clubs with overseas owners, the vast wealth that allows clubs to buy "reputation", and a strong element of fashion and snobbery.

A vicious circle of contempt has developed for English managers. More and more jobs filled by foreign imports means less and less opportunity for home-grown leaders.

The statistics themselves are shameful; so is the widespread tolerance of this insulting trend by fans, media and players. The culture of the game has grown rotten in this regard, self respect crushed by greed.

Will it ever change? Indeed, can it ever change? Well, maybe, just maybe, there are glimpses of hope.

One of the few English managers in the Premier League, Eddie Howe, has inspired minnows Bournemouth to make a strong start this season, playing attractive, organised football with a squad of unsung talents.

In any other country, his accomplishments in taking a tiny outfit into the top flight for the first time in their history and then keeping them up for at least four years would already have earned him a major job.

Maurizio Sarri, for example, had achieved less when invited to take charge of Napoli.

Howe should be at the top of the list whenever Tottenham Hotspur, Arsenal or Manchester United next decide to change their manager. But these clubs will almost certainly avoid football logic and instead heed the sound of derision that would inevitably fill the airwaves of radio phone-ins and social media, amid the demand for a "big name".

But why, you may ask, are Chelsea and Liverpool not included on that list?

Well, there is good reason.

Another cause for optimism about the English manager is the positive start made by Frank Lampard in control of team affairs at Derby County in the Championship. John Terry has also begun life in the dugout as an assistant boss at Aston Villa. And that is where Chelsea are likely to look in the future.

A further ray of hope is the way Steven Gerrard has taken like a duck to water in Glasgow as the new manager at Rangers, which is no easy job for a novice. That is where Liverpool will turn next.

We must hope that these young hopefuls turn the tide of perception to bring the English manager back into vogue.

It is profoundly untrue that England has no decent managers and coaches. The problem for too long is that they have not been allowed opportunity.

Maybe one route is for more to travel abroad and return with a reputation. That was the path taken by the unheralded Graham Potter, who performed miracles at Ostersund in Sweden and is now in the process of turning round the fortunes of Swansea City.

This pattern is working for young players such as Jadon Sancho and Mason Mount.

Perhaps the most telling example of the wind of change, though, is the rise of Gareth Southgate, who is as eloquent and impressive as they come.

His appointment with England was initially greeted with serious scepticism, but he took his chance as national manager and, with his quiet intelligence, Southgate moulded a modern style of football that took his team to the World Cup semi-finals and, more recently, a famous away victory against Spain.

Whisper it very quietly, but it looks like the only way is up. WS

> The Premier League has never been won by an English manager in 26 years of existence

Promise...Derby County manager Frank Lampard (centre) has made an impressive start to his new career

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Outdated...the Estadio Centenario

2030 World Cup up for grabs

So much for the Nations League, and the European Championship is yet to start again. But what about the future of the World Cup?

Firstly, everything is settled for 2022, with no more talk of taking it away from Qatar. That sort of antagonistic chatter was always hot air, anyway. Once FIFA had signed the contract the hosting was set.

The only debate now surrounds whether there will be 32 or 48 teams, with a formal decision to be taken by FIFA Council in March, ahead of the draw for the qualifying competition.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino says he is keeping an open mind as that is what he knows Africa, Asia, CONCACAF and CONMEBOL want to hear. But Qatar has long since envisaged cutting its hosting cloth to eight stadia, while accommodation concerns are already being raised.

Similarly, 2026 is all settled. The USA, thanks to a decisive vote in FIFA Congress in Moscow in June, will be the core host, with the support of Canada and Mexico. While critics still moan about distances, remember that this is a tournament that spread itself across the vast space of Brazil in 2010 and western Russia in 2018.

The sports-bidding industry has been asleep ever since the 2026 decision, and on the Olympic side ever since last year when the IOC had little option but to hand 2024 to Paris and 2028 to Los Angeles. As for the Winter Olympics, fewer and fewer cities are being allowed by their own taxpayers to shoulder the cost.

Hosts...Uruguay (in blue) take on Ghana in the Under-17 Women's World Cup

But football is a different story. A host of smaller nations want to share in the FIFA largesse bestowed from hosting the junior tournaments. As a result, prospective bidders are already gathering for the 2030 World Cup and beyond.

Naturally, the romantic vision would be to take the centenary tournament back to its launch pad, in Uruguay, where the nation marked its own 100th anniversary in 1930 by welcoming the world – even if FIFA president Jules Rimet had to lean on his own French federation to join three other European FAs in the pioneering Atlantic sea crossing.

A nation of 68,000 square miles and 3.4million people, Uruguay cannot stage a repeat on its own. Thirteen teams played in 1930, but in 2030 it will be 48 – if not more. Hence the

first act has been the preparation of a co-hosting bid with neighbours Paraguay to the north west and Argentina to the south and west.

The Uruguayans believe they have a strong case and CONMEBOL will support them. And while that only means 10 votes, they believe that increasingly strong ties with CONCACAF will bring in more support from the Caribbean and Central & North America.

Morocco, five times a loser when it comes to hosting, has evinced a will to bid again – maybe with Algeria and Tunisia, maybe with Portugal and Spain across the Straits of Gibraltar. However, the first option looks questionable and UEFA would take a dim view of the second. As UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin says, updating the 2010 official song: "It's time for Europe."

Unofficially, albeit still at an early stage, UEFA would look favourably on a co-host bid from the four British home nations plus the Republic of Ireland. That is already five votes within the European federation itself.

Such a bid can tell its own historic tale, given England's role as the 19th-century cradle of the modern game. FA chairman Greg Clarke has flown busily around the continent since his election in succession to Greg Dyke in 2016 to improve sporting and political relations and relationships.

That is likely to stand him in good stead when he contests UEFA's slot for a British FIFA vice-president. Success for Clarke would be considered a positive step down the road towards England's place as core partner of a five-way co-hosting in 2030.

A surprise was a statement of co-host bidding intent from Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Serbia. But the real Balkan target here is building momentum and credibility towards pursuit of the finals of the European Championship in 2028.

In the meantime, what are the prospects for Uruguay for 2030?

The Uruguayans have just staged the Under-17 Women's World Cup and carried it off with aplomb – evidence once more of the boast by old coach Ondino Viera that "other countries have their history, Uruguay has its football".

For the Uruguayans their greatest pride is also their greatest problem: the Estadio Centenario.

At the recent championship decider, in which Penarol secured their 50th Primera Division crown by beating old *Clasico* rivals Nacional 2-1 after extra time, the atmosphere generated by the two sets of supporters with their incessant drumming, chanting and singing was magnificent.

But the Centenario was originally thrown together in only eight months. It is now 88 years old and looks it. The walls are decorated with photographs of the old heroes, but the pictures are black-and-white and from another era. The football world has long since transformed and upgraded into ultra-high definition colour.

Walking into the Centenario is like walking back in time. It remains rooted in its own history as the protected national monument it has been designated. It is breathtaking – but as a venue for the 2030 World Cup Final it's impossible.

> "Other countries have their history, Uruguay has its football"
>
> Former national coach Ondino Viera

For the Under-17 Women's World Cup, the Uruguayans used the upgraded little Estadio Charrua rugby ground in Montevideo and minimalist venues in Colonia del Sacramento to the west and Maldonado to the east. They served a purpose for this event but that is all.

If the Uruguayans are serious about staging the World Cup Final in 2030 they must find, from somewhere, the funds to build one major new stadium and at least one more to match Penarol's new 40,000-capacity Estadio Campeón del Siglo. The Centenario might stage some sort of pre-finals gala but that is all.

If Uruguay really wants the World Cup it must come to terms with its history... and move on. And signal that intention very fast. WS

WINNERS

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN
Became the first team to win all 12 of their opening fixtures in one of Europe's top five leagues.

SHANGHAI SIPG
Ended Guangzhou Evergrande's run of seven straight Chinese Super League titles with their first-ever national championship.

HUDDERSFIELD TOWN
A 1-0 win at home to Fulham in the Premier League saw the Terriers become the last team in Europe's five major leagues to register a victory.

LOSERS

AURELIO ANDREAZZOLI
On the day that he was celebrating his 65th birthday, the coach was sacked by Serie A strugglers Empoli following a 5-1 defeat away at Napoli.

GREMIO
Holding a 1-0 first-leg lead over River Plate, they lost 2-1 at home in the return game to a 95th-minute penalty to exit the Libertadores Cup semi-finals.

USAIN BOLT
The former Olympic sprint champion was released by Central Coast Mariners after scoring just two goals during an eight-week trial in his attempt to earn a full-time contract.

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Man City are too good for a two-tier Premier League

There is a mounting sense in England this season that Manchester City are simply too good. The problem is not merely that they are a club of staggering resources, it is that they have deployed those resources supremely well.

There was much mockery when City spoke of their desire to be more "holistic" when they sacked Roberto Mancini in 2013, but they are a gleaming example of what happens when everything at a club works in harmony, when players are bought to suit a manager's philosophy.

Their victory over Manchester United in November fitted the pattern of all five league derbies since Pep Guardiola and Jose Mourinho arrived in Manchester in that the result didn't reflect City's dominance. Nonetheless, it contained some startling passages of play. It is extraordinary, for instance, that by the time David Silva scored the opening goal after 12 minutes, they had completed 96 passes to United's five. Fernandinho completed six in the move that led to City's third goal.

And that's Manchester United, the richest club in the world, being unable to compete. For clubs with fewer resources, there is no chance.

Twelve games into this season, City were averaging 63.7 per cent possession. In other words, twice as much of the ball as their opponents. At some point this ceases to be football as we know it and becomes another sport altogether.

Quick start... Manchester City's opener in the derby against United

> By the time David Silva scored the opening goal after 12 minutes, City had completed 96 passes to United's five

Battle...Liverpool (in red) try to compete with Manchester City

Doubts over whether they have obeyed FFP regulations aside, that's not to blame City. They are just very good and have exploited better than anybody else a financial environment that has inflated the gulf between rich and poor. That in-built inequality is the reason that after 12 rounds of games three teams were still unbeaten.

The Premier League, at least until recently, has always prided itself on its competitiveness. Everyone can beat everyone we keep being told. Yet at that 12-game mark, teams from the top five had played teams from the bottom five 20 times – and all 20 games had been won by the top five.

Project the current points totals over the season as a whole and it's quite possible that Liverpool could get more than 90 points and still finish significantly adrift of City. It may also be that as few as 25 points will be enough to stay up. It's a long time since the 40-point barrier managers used to speak of has actually been needed to guarantee survival.

And this isn't purely an English phenomenon. Although La Liga is enjoying one of those chaotic seasons that come along every now and again, and Bayern Munich are having a rare season of strife, in France and Italy it's a familiar story of Paris Saint-Germain and Juventus dominance. And even in Spain and Germany nobody really thinks that Barcelona, Real Madrid and Bayern are going to miss out on Champions League qualification.

This is a Europe-wide issue and one of the main driving forces behind the urge for a super league.

Or, rather, it's the factor that may lead fans to accept a super league.

While there are some fans who seem to relish watching a superior side eviscerate a smaller one, most surely want to witness something resembling a contest – and domestic leagues are finding that increasingly difficult to deliver. A super league then becomes a logical next step, even though this will inevitably alienate clubs from the communities that produced them.

The inequality also shapes how football is played. Fifteen years ago there was only one Premier League game in the whole season in which

one side had more than 70 per cent possession; last season there were more than 80. More and more games are essentially attack against defence.

In part that's a reaction to Guardiola's Barcelona. Because they dominated the ball so much, other sides became more comfortable playing without the ball. Where once there may have been a sense of panic, even shame, if the opposition seemed to be bossing possession, teams began to realise they could still shape a game even without the ball. But it's also because the disparity in resources is now so great that often one team simply cannot get the ball.

That in turn has a significant impact. It can lead to complacency and the sort of self-indulgence that so often seems to afflict PSG in Europe. Used to dominating in France, their players become used to pleasing themselves. But even for sides who play with discipline, the transition from playing a game with 70 per cent of

Tough...PSG's Neymar is stopped by Napoli

the ball to one with 50 per cent is hard.

This has been one of Guardiola's problems, not just at City but also at Bayern and, towards the end, at Barcelona as well. His sides would concede few goals because they controlled possession so well against weaker sides, but then be exposed defensively by teams who could play through their press. City's performance at Anfield this season suggested he has begun to address that, but they still play in that conservative way rarely enough that the latter stages of the Champions League will be a big challenge.

And the point, anyway, is that this is indicative of a wider problem. Teams effectively end up playing two different sorts of football: one against those who are of their level and one against those who aren't. WS

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

1 KNOCKOUT BLOW

Deportivo Cali defender Juan Sebastian Quintero survived an attack by a motorcycle gunman who tried to kill the 23-year-old after his team were eliminated from the Colombian league title race.

Despite beating Pasto 1-0, their players were pelted with eggs during a game that saw their league hopes end.

The gunman, wearing a Deportivo Cali shirt, opened fire on Quintero's car after pulling alongside the player.

"He knocked on the car window and told me: 'You're dead'." said Quintero.

Banned...Bohs' Bob Marley shirt

Fair play... Djibril Cisse

2 SWEET CHOICE OF CLOBBER

Former Liverpool and France forward Djibril Cisse took to the catwalk – in a suit made of chocolate.

The striker who currently plays for AS Vincenza 1902 in Italy, was modelling for charity at the 2018 Salon du Chocolat fair in Paris.

The annual chocolate fair sees celebrities parade in outfits that can be eaten in order to raise money for the Association Mecenat Cardiac Surgery.

The suit was designed by artisan chocolatier Jean-Luc Decluzeau.

3 BOHS WAIT IN VAIN

League of Ireland side Bohemians have been forced to change their new away kit because they don't have permission to use an image of Bob Marley's face on the shirt.

Designed as a tribute to the late reggae legend, who performed at the club's home stadium Dalymount Park in 1980, the top had been hailed as "the dopest shirt I've seen" by the singer's son, Ky-Mani Marley.

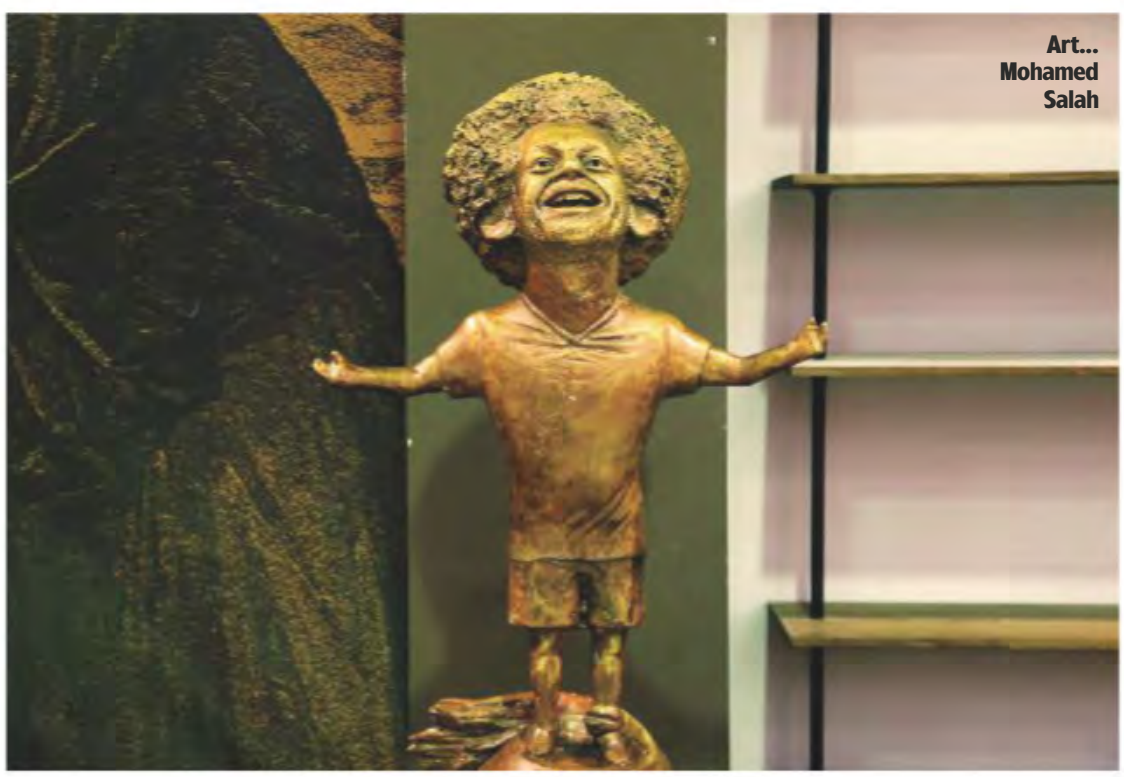
4 SKINT SUPERSTAR

When a magistrate in Brazil froze the bank accounts of former Barcelona and Milan star Ronaldinho after he failed to pay a fine of €2million, it was discovered that the 38-year-old had less than €6 to his name.

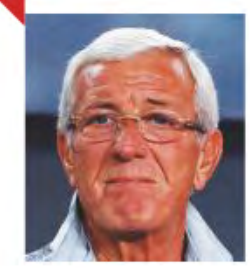
The financial penalty was levied three years ago when the player and his brother, Roberto de Assis, were sanctioned for environmental damage caused by a construction project carried out in a protected area in Porto Alegre.

5 WHO ARE YA?

Hot on the heels of the infamous Cristiano Ronaldo statue comes a sculpture of Liverpool and Egypt striker Mohamed Salah in the Egyptian city of Sharm al Sheikh which critics claim looks nothing like the player.



Art... Mohamed Salah



"China is too far from my hometown. Now I want to enjoy life with my family"

Marcello Lippi is to quit as China coach after January's Asian Cup

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Appointments, sackings and loans

IN

Back...Jocelyn Gourvennec

Challenge... Giuseppe Iachini

EUROPE

Real Madrid appointed **SANTIAGO SOLARI** as coach after dismissing Julen Lopetegui.

DOMENICO DI CARLO took charge of Chievo for a third spell, replacing Giampiero Ventura, who quit the Serie A strugglers after just four games. **DAVIDE NICOLA** replaced Julio Velazquez at Udinese, while Empoli replaced Aurelio Andreazzoli with **GIUSEPPE IACHINI**. Serie B side Crotone hired former Pescara and Udinese coach **MASSIMO ODDO**.

Former PAOK and Panathinaikos boss **ANGELOS ANASTASIADIS** took over from Michael Skibbe as coach of Greece.

JOCELYN GOURVENNEC, who led Guingamp to the 2014 French Cup during a previous six-year spell in charge, returned to the club to replace Antoine Kombouare.

Former France striker **NICOLAS ANELKA** joined Lille's back-room staff, working with the youth and reserve sides.

La Liga strugglers Celta Vigo replaced coach Antonio Mohamed with **MIGUEL CARDOSO**.

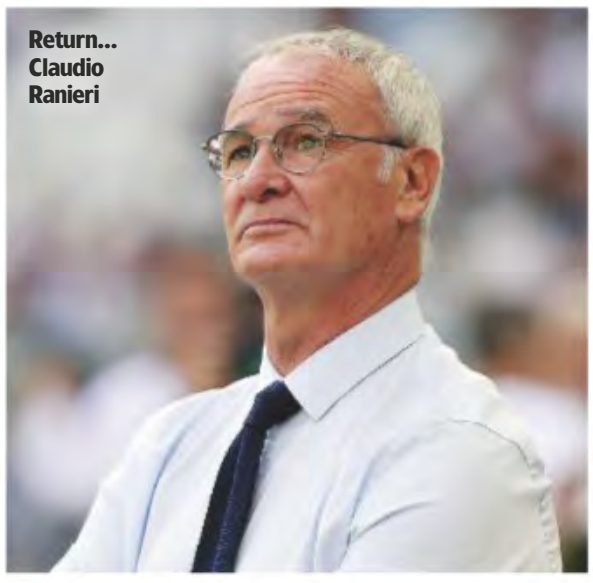
Iran international striker **KARIM ANSARIFARD**, who was released by Greek side Olympiakos, joined English Championship club Nottingham Forest.

AFRICA

AKBAR PATEL, who led Mauritius to the gold medal at the Indian Ocean Islands Games on home soil in 2003, returned for a fourth spell in charge of the national side ahead of next year's hosting of the regional tournament.

ASIA

SVEN GORAN ERIKSSON signed a six-month deal to coach Philippines ahead of January's Asian Cup.



Return... Claudio Ranieri

Ranieri takes charge at Fulham

CLAUDIO RANIERI replaced Slavisa Jokanovic as manager of Fulham. The 67-year-old was coach of Nantes last season, which was his first job since being sacked by Leicester City in February 2017.

OUT

EUROPE

Republic of Ireland coach **MARTIN O'NEILL** stood down, along with assistant **ROY KEANE**.

Fenerbahce sacked coach **PHILLIP COCU** after four months in charge of the Turkish side.

Former England midfielder **JOE COLE**, whose last club was Tampa Bay Rowdies in the USA second tier, announced his retirement at 37.

Capped 109 times by Holland, 35-year-old Rafael **VAN DER VAART** announced his retirement after a training-ground injury limited him to just three appearances for his latest club, Esbjerg of Denmark.

KENNY SHIELS was sacked as manager of League of Ireland side Derry City.

ASIA

Former Italy boss **MARCELLO LIPPI** confirmed that he will stand down as coach of China after January's Asian Cup.

Sacked... Kenny Shiels

All over...Joe Cole called time on his playing career

"I actually wanted to still be playing as a grandad but I'm not going to manage it"

Rafael Van der Vaart announces his retirement at the age of 35

OBITUARIES

Peter VELAPPAN (1935-2018)

Asian football lost a good friend among the wider world with the death of the man responsible for turning football across the continent from a fragmented muddle into a coherent entity.

It was an impressive achievement because Asia is the one sporting continent which is horizontal and not vertical, so running Asian football means co-ordinating a cacophony of time zones and climate varieties as well as cultures.

Velappan made this his life's work during his 29 years as general secretary of the Asian Football Confederation. He retired in 2007 just as the caravan of Middle Eastern sheikhs and their cohorts arrived to bend the game's architecture to their own ends.

His work laid a foundation on which the millionaires from Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia could build their own self-aggrandising political monuments.

Not that everyone appreciated his work at the time, building AFC coherence out of his own back yard in Malaysia. Various presidents have toyed with the idea of shifting the headquarters from Kuala Lumpur but none has succeeded.

That is a tribute to the happy coincidence that Velappan was Malaysian and appreciated that reaching both west and east extremes of Asian football meant working from a centre that was both geographical and political. The successive failure of others has created only divisive suspicion and resentment.

> He was considered a replacement should Blatter have been levered out of the general secretary's role

Velappan's demands on behalf of the Asian game did not always go down well in a FIFA whose world federation outlook was focused for many decades on Europe and South America. Admiration was grudgingly gained to the extent that Velappan was considered a replacement should Sepp Blatter ever have been levered out of the general secretary's role during Joao Havelange's era.

Velappan was born on October 1, 1935 in Negeri Sembilan on the western coast of the Malaysian peninsula. He studied in England at the Birmingham University and Loughborough College, and then McGill University in Canada. He taught English and literature in Negeri Sembilan before joining the fledgling AFC in 1954.

Impressive... Peter Velappan

From 1963 to 1980 he was the assistant secretary of the Football Association of Malaysia. In 1972 he was the team manager who guided the national side to the 1972 Olympic Games football tournament.

And in 1992 it was Velappan who persuaded suspiciously reluctant AFC directors to appoint a marketing partner which ultimately enabled it to capitalise effectively on football's television and sponsorship explosion.

But not everything ran as smoothly. In 1999 he organised a walkout of Asian delegates at FIFA Congress in protest at Asia's allocation of spots for the 2002 World Cup. He also clashed with various AFC presidents, confident that the support of a wide swath of national associations would keep him in place.

At the 2004 Asian Cup finals in Beijing he was forced to apologise for criticising Chinese fans for bad manners and questioning whether Beijing should host the 2008 Olympics.

The high point of Velappan's career on the international stage was acting as co-ordination director of the organising committee of the politically sensitive 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea. The finals provided Velappan with his most personally sensitive moments in football – years later he revealed how, as a child brought up on a rubber plantation, he witnessed the Japanese army sweeping across Malaya in 1941.

He crossed swords with his own AFC president, Mohamed Bin Hammam, when supporting Sheikh Salman instead of the Qatari for a seat on the FIFA executive, attacking Bin Hammam's "undemocratic" approach to football governance and saying: "He was a very good president in the first four years, but after that he was more interested in the power."

An epitaph for so many in football, before and since.

Keir Radnedge

Ken SHELLITO (1940-2018)

Former Chelsea full-back who spent his entire playing career at Stamford Bridge and went on to manage the club from July 1977 to December 1978. Capped once by England, in 1963, he also played against a Rest of the World XI in that same year to celebrate the centenary of the Football Association.

Blue...Shellito played for and managed Chelsea

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Decisive...Harry Kane scores England's winner against Croatia

Steady on! Let's not get too carried away with England and Nations League

England, praise be, have gone through to the next stage of the current European competition, but has the general euphoria been exaggerated?

There is no question that, on balance of play, the victory over Croatia was well deserved, and that England's first-half dominance deserved to put them comfortably ahead. But, against the run of play, Croatia took the lead in a manner that impugned an erratic England defence and it was only with two scrambled goals that England achieved what was surely their just deserts.

The opening goal which England embarrassingly gave away posed a large question mark over the England defence.

Croatia, arguably, should have scored much earlier, when a blatant error by keeper Jordan Pickford, allowing a ball to bounce back off his chest under pressure, presented a gaping goal to Ante Rebic, who could do no better than shoot over the bar. When Andrej Kramaric received the ball in the box with his back to goal, he twisted and turned to hold off the defence before letting fly a shot which deflected off Eric Dier to end in the net.

By that time England should have been well ahead, but it took a worryingly long time before they turned their superiority into winning goals.

> It was only with two scrambled goals that England achieved what was surely their just deserts

In the previous game against Croatia, in a deserted stadium, they deserved to win, having twice hit the woodwork, but had to settle for a goalless draw.

Remember, though, that this highly unpredictable Croatia team, which had beaten England in the previous World Cup, had been thrashed 6-0 by Spain, who they ultimately proceeded to beat in the return with a late goal.

Hat-trick hero... Haris Seferovic

So all credit and praise to England for turning the game around, but let us keep a sense of proportion. On the same day as England's victory, Switzerland brought off an astonishing and crucial victory at home to Belgium, who, to many of us, had seemed the best team in the preceding World Cup.

All seemed lost for the Swiss when a couple of early goals by Thorgan Hazard looked to have put Belgium up and away. But hugely to their credit the Swiss refused to lie down and by half-time the home team were 3-2 ahead.

Nor did they lose command of the game after the break. Haris Seferovic scored a hat-trick, Nico Elvedi atoned for a shocking early mistake which had given away the first Belgian goal by scoring himself and the Swiss sailed through as imposing 5-2 winners.

So much for the team that had come so close to winning the World Cup. WS

United's summer transfers don't add up

Manchester City are reportedly under investigation for supposed illicit spending. It is alleged that the books have been cooked to enable them to exceed the proscribed limits. Paris Saint-Germain in France, who are also backed by immense wealth, are reportedly under examination as well. Were it found that either club is guilty they should presumably incur a hefty fine and a transfer ban.

Manchester United are under no such examination but you watch and wonder as their hugely costly transfer policy falls apart. The Brazilian midfielder Fred arrived in the summer at colossal cost from Shakhtar Donetsk but has failed to find anything like a regular place.

An immense sum brought in Alexis Sanchez from Arsenal at a salary estimated at more than £300,000 a week, yet he has made scant impact. Who would attempt to buy him now at such crippling cost in fee and wages?

You do wonder to what extent Jose Mourinho was behind these transfers.

Struggling...Fred

Unchallenged... Gordon Taylor

PFA's Taylor under mounting pressure

How long will Gordon Taylor remain as chief executive of the Professional Footballers' Association now that he, and his monumental salary of £2.2million a year, is under severe challenge?

Taylor has been in office for an unchallenged 37 years and it has been argued that the nature of his role means he cannot be removed by a vote. However, PFA chairman Ben Purkiss has called for a review.

Purkiss has made a special point of condemning Taylor's lack of effective action over the vexed issue of dementia and footballers. And here I have a grain of sympathy for Taylor.

While I have huge sympathy for the family of Jeff Astle, the former West Bromwich Albion and England centre-forward, whose sadly early death was definitely ascribed to heading the ball, I am forced back to my previous position, which is to say that so utterly beyond all doubt heading is often responsible for dementia – Stiles, Wilson, Peters, et al – that the only possible solution is to ban heading altogether. Alas, it is plain that this will never be done.

Some players – Alan Shearer, Geoff Hurst, Dixie Dean – went on heading goals throughout their distinguished careers with no hint of damage. Others, alas, did not.

It would be a lottery or a gamble, but if the one valid solution is to ban heading altogether, do you think such a move would ever gain sufficient support among players and coaches?

World Cup films are never easy

Daring to Dream, a new documentary about England's prowess at the last World Cup was released to damning dismissal. It isn't helped by the fact that copyright issues precluded match commentary.

It takes me back to the official World Cup film, *GOAL!*, on which I worked in 1966 and which received fulsome criticism. It was well summed up by Michael Samuelson, of that huge film and TV emporium of the same name, who acted as a cameraman for a largely French team. "It wasn't a team," he said. "It was a happening."

How right he was. I myself wasn't called in to write the script till everything was in the can. The initial writer's commentary had been thrown out. I was telephoned by a girl working on the programme whom I had worked with on Michael Parkinson programmes on TV. Was I interested? Of course I was.

When I arrived it was to find a work in chaos. Much splendid material hopelessly assembled. There was only £300 in it for me, but England's triumph allured me.

"Make your voice heard," said the head of production and this I managed to do, battling with two inexperienced directors.

There was enough material to create an exciting film and it opened in the West End to great praise and success – even if on the basis of our footage we couldn't be sure about that Geoff Hurst goal...

Memories...the 1966 World Cup

● Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

eye witness

Steve Menary reports

OMAN

New horizons for national team

Gulf Cup winners now turn attention to the Asian Cup

In the plush surroundings of the Chedi, probably Muscat's finest hotel, Pim Verbeek is contemplating the end of a long and successful career.

The well-travelled Dutchman has worked all across the world, from the Caribbean to Africa, from Australia to Asia, and he has been to the World Cup finals. But the Asian Cup in January will be his last big tournament.

"I always wanted to work in the Middle East as I've played many games there," says Verbeek.

"The only interesting place with a good quality of life was Oman, and when a new board came in I got the call and was offered a contract in 2016.

"There were some challenges, like the Gulf Cup and to qualify for the Asian Cup, and I think it will be my final job."

He had immediate success, winning the 2017 Gulf Cup, beating the United Arab Emirates on penalties in the Final, and now takes Oman to the Asian Cup finals for only the fourth time. "This is like the World Cup for Oman," explains the 62-year-old.

The closest Oman have come to reaching a major international football tournament was the 2012 Olympic Games in London – they lost 2-0 in a play-off with Senegal for the final spot – and Verbeek believes "there should be more from that generation [in my team], but maybe they picked the wrong club or did not train."

That an Omani side even got close to a major international tournament like the Olympics is almost a miracle. "Individually, they are all good players because they play wherever they can, in the park or the beach. There is a lot of talent, but there is no youth system," sighs Verbeek.

Oman has a national under-16 team but players are recruited from a handful of private academies and schools, and in some cases even the beach.

"I've got kids in our academy that ➤

> "They play wherever they can, in the park or the beach. There is a lot of talent"
>
> **National coach Pim Verbeek**

had only played street or beach football up to the age of 16 or 17," says Chuck Martini, who runs the Muscat Football Academy. "By that age they have developed bad habits that you can't get rid of."

A former goalkeeper, Martini played in England and the USA before opening an academy in Oman in 2013.

Like Verbeek, he believes that Oman has the most naturally talented players in the Gulf but the structure of the domestic game is letting them down.

"There's a real hotbed of talent here but it's not nurtured," says Martini. "Would you send your son to play football somewhere where they might not get paid two weeks later? There's no sense of professionalism."

The league is only semi-professional and top-flight clubs get 50,000 Rials (£100,000) each from the federation. The league champions earn 150,000 Rials and winners of the Sultan Qaboos Cup – named after the country's ailing leader – get 250,000 Rials.

With sponsors and local businessmen covering the wage bill, local players get from 7,000 Rials a season but all have full-time jobs and train after work. With players often more focused on their day job they can lack motivation. Out-of-favour players can experience late payment and in retaliation they may refuse to train. Turning up late to training is not uncommon and rarely merits punishment by a club.

Teams can sign up to four foreigners, who are all full-time and get at least 1,000 Rials a month. Some earn more than 30,000 Rials a season and signing on fees of 20,000 Rials are not unheard of, but overseas players have little to do during the day as their team-mates are at work.

"You can go into the ground and train or go to the physio or just go to the beach," says Rami Cortez-Chaer, who moved to Oman in 2014 after playing in England. "Every foreign player comes to Muscat and doesn't want to leave.

"In Salalah or near the UAE border there's nothing to do. That's why everyone wants to join Muscat or Oman."

And Martini sees none of the attachment between clubs and their supporters that he witnessed when playing in England for Wycombe Wanderers or managing at non-league clubs such as Godalming Town. "There's no sense of community involvement," he acknowledges. "It would help if they had their own grounds."

Play-off...the Olympic qualifier against Senegal

League games in Muscat are often played at the Sultan Qaboos Stadium, where a few hundred fans rattle around the 34,000-capacity national stadium.

Derby games in Seeb or Salalah draw crowds of 3,000 but some provincial top-flight clubs play home games in bigger stadiums away from their base.

Even though clubs do not charge on the gate, fans prefer to watch in the air-conditioned cool of a cafe or at home as the whole league is screened on

MOVERS & SHAKERS

● SHEIKH SALIM AL WAHAIBI
Elected unopposed as chairman of the Oman Football Association in August 2016, he was on the board twice before, in 1994-97 and 2002-04, and has been honorary chairman of the Muscat club since 2000.

● PIM VERBEEK
The Dutchman played at Roda, NAC Breda and Sparta Rotterdam before starting a long career in management in 1981 that included coaching the national sides of Netherlands Antilles, Australia and South Korea. He took the Oman job in 2016.

● ALI AL HABSI
The veteran goalkeeper is the only Omani to ever have played in the English Premier League, where he featured for Wigan Athletic. He has made more than 120 appearances for Oman and is currently with Saudi club Al Hilal.

Veteran... Ali Al Habsi

Lively...Jameel Al Yahmadi

● JAMEEL AL YAHMADI
One to watch in the Asian Cup finals, the lively winger left Al Shabab to sign for Qatari side Al Wakrah this summer and has the ability to succeed in Europe.

● TARIQ AL SADI
Nicknamed "The Omani Messi", the 12-year-old graduate of the Muscat Football Academy moved to England in 2017 after signing a three-year development agreement with Championship side Aston Villa.

television. Another reason for the disconnect is a rapid turnover of coaches and players. Presidents change at least every four years due to elections and a new president usually hires a new coach, often from abroad. They bring in new players but get little time to succeed.

"I've played here two seasons and gone through five managers already," says Tariq Al Mahrooqi, who is a striker with the Oman club. "They need the foreign players. We did badly at the start of this season then signed three Brazilians and did much better."

Former Croatia under-18 international Vedran Gerc signed for Sohar in 2015 and was the league's top scorer in his first season in Oman, but returned home this summer to play in Croatia's third tier.

"The football standard is very low

Academy boss ...Chuck Martini

Determined...Harib Al Saadi (left) and Fahmi Durbein in the Gulf Cup semi-final victory over Bahrain

Success...winning the Gulf Cup in Kuwait

compared to European countries," he says. "The standard of living there for Omani people is very, very good. They live in nice houses and they drive new cars and they have good businesses."

Football is the national sport but short-termism reigns. Previous attempts by the federation to set up grass-roots centres were taken over by the clubs, who spent the money on players' wages.

All of which makes Verbeek's success even more admirable.

With former Wigan Athletic and Reading goalkeeper Ali Al Habsi now back in the Middle East with Al Hilal in Saudi Arabia, Verbeek's only European-based player is Raed Ibrahim Saleh at Maltese champions Valetta. After a year as a full-time professional and playing in UEFA competition, Verbeek has noticed a big difference in the midfielder, who will be one of Oman's most experienced players at the Asian Cup finals.

The only other overseas-based players likely to feature are a quintet playing in Qatar's second division. Veteran midfielder Ahmed Mubarak has been playing in Qatar since 2014 and has family there, but the other four are young. Yet for players such as Nadhir Awadh, who is a 24-year-old defender with Al Shanania, the Qatari second tier simply pays better than the Omani top flight.

Despite the standard of Oman's local league and a lack of overseas stars, the national side were the best side at the recent Gulf Cup but Verbeek admits there was no pressure on them.

Having won in 2009, the Gulf Cup victory in Kuwait was Oman's second success, but the Asian Cup is a big step up. In three previous appearances they have won just two games and never gone beyond the group stage.

> "There's a real hotbed of talent here but it's not nurtured. Would you send your son to play football somewhere where they might not get paid two weeks later?"
>
> **Chuck Martini, Muscat Football Academy**

In 2019 the finals are across the border in the UAE and Al Habsi, the team's star player, says Oman have their best-ever chance of making the knockout phase: "Now there are 24 teams and the chance to qualify for the second round is better. We know that our league is not the best in the world. Of course, it will be very tight, very tough, we have big teams there in our group. We need a hard job from us."

Oman will be well supported in the UAE but have a difficult draw in group F.

Verbeek says of their opponents: "Japan are maybe number one in Asia and Uzbekistan are always going to be difficult as they have a Russian mentality and will be strong. I don't know so much about Turkmenistan, so we will say can we get four points from the other games and maybe nick a point from Japan?

"We have to be realistic. Our target is to go to the next round but the problem is goals. We are well organised and have no big egos so we are a proper team, but to win a tournament like that you need some special players who can score. We don't have that and we have to score goals as a team, and that is harder."

Verbeek says the federation is tackling the junior issue and his contract runs until 2020, but after the finals he plans to talk with the federation.

"I think this is enough," adds Verbeek. "All the coaches abroad who are away a long time they say they miss things with their children and don't want to miss those things with their grandchildren."

The end is nigh, and Verbeek and Oman want to go out on a high. WS

AFC Cup action...Al Suwaiq goalkeeper Faiz Al Rushaidi

European-based... Raed Ibrahim Saleh

Celebration...fans in Muscat welcome home their national team after they won the Gulf Cup in January

OMAN PROFESSIONAL LEAGUE 2018-19

AL NAHDA
Formed in a merger between Al Buraimi and Mahdah in 2003. Based in Al Buraimi, the club have won three league titles, the last in 2014.

AL NASR
Originally from Al Haffa, Al Nasr merged with Al Shate'a in 1972 and relocated to Salalah. League winners five times, most recently in 2004, and Sultan Qaboos Cup winners in 2018.

AL OROUBA
Backed by Sheikh Salem Bin Said Al Fannah, chairman of local energy giants Galfar, the Sur-based club are four-time champions, the last in 2015.

AL RUSTAQ
Immediately relegated after promotion in 2016, the club from the Al Batna region bounced straight back.

AL SHABAB
Runners-up in the last two seasons, they were formed in 2003 following a merger between Barkaa and Wady Al Mawil.

AL SUWAIQ
The reigning league champions are from Al Batinah and play in Seeb, where they are well supported. Made the last 16 of the AFC Cup in 2012.

DHOFAR
The club from Salalah benefit from the stability of a long-serving president in Sheikh Badr Al Rowas, who has been in charge since 2007. Won 10 league titles, most recently in 2017, and in the running again this season.

MAJEES
Promoted last season but struggling in the top flight.

MIRBAT
The football wing of a multi-sport club from Salalah.

MUSCAT
Three-times league winners, the last in 2006. Later relegated, they returned to the top flight in 2015 and are among the front runners this season.

OMAN CLUB
Founded in 1932, they were Asian Club Championship runners-up in 1994 and Omani champions in 1997.

SAHAM
Gulf Champions League runners-up in 2014.

SOHAR
From Al Batinah and the arch-rivals of Saham, they were promoted to the top flight in 2013.

SUR
Founded in the 1960s by Kuwaitis, they were league winners twice in the 1990s. Little recent success but have a strong focus on youth.

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eyewitness

Joel Richards in Buenos Aires

ARGENTINA

Biggest game of all called off

Libertadores Cup in chaos as second leg of the Final is postponed after team-bus attack

It was billed as the Final of all Finals; the biggest club game ever. For the first time in the history of the Libertadores Cup, the Final of South America's top competition would be decided between River Plate and Boca Juniors.

This was possibly the most important match in Argentinian club football history. Not only were the stakes higher than ever, this *superclasico* would be played in front of a worldwide audience. It would also be a passionate, intense and vibrant curtain-raiser to the most important global event that Argentina has ever ▸

Abandoned...fans are told to leave River Plate's El Monumental

hosted: the G20 leaders' summit.

After a draw in the first leg, the return at River's El Monumental would be winner takes all. But as the world tuned in on matchday, security forces, violent supporters, the players and clubs, as well as the South American football organising body CONMEBOL, were all involved in a miserable spectacle.

Nothing that happened had not been seen before in Argentina's football, but the sheer dimension of this match made it all the more scandalous.

This article should have been about an astonishing chapter in one of world football's great rivalries.

Over 100-years old, River Plate and Boca Juniors dominate Argentinian football and the *superclasico* attracts international audiences for its folklore and passion. The iconic and mythical stadiums, El Monumental and the Bombonera, are revered as monuments to the South American game.

But instead of telling the story of an historic match, this is a tale of Argentinian football's failure.

Violence...River Plate supporters detained after clashes with security forces

At just after 3pm on Saturday, November 24, under two hours before kick-off, Boca Juniors' team bus approached El Monumental. As it turned off Libertador Avenue onto Lidoro Quinteros Avenue, five blocks from the stadium, a throng of River Plate supporters pelted the bus with bottles and rocks, smashing windows.

Police fired tear gas to disperse the River supporters. The driver fainted. When the bus finally arrived at the stadium, several players were retching from the tear gas. Team captain Pablo Perez had shards of glass in an eye and was taken to hospital, along with midfielder Gonzalo Lamardo. They would be deemed unfit to play by doctors, although that was something CONMEBOL medical staff did not corroborate.

"We are in no state to play," striker Carlos Tevez told reporters. "But they are forcing us to play."

In the chaos, CONMEBOL pushed back the kick-off time once, and then once more. FIFA president Gianni Infantino, in Buenos Aires just for the game, would later be obliged to tell the newspaper *La Nacion*: "Given the false rumours, I want to clarify that at no point did I ask that the game go ahead."

It was only after River and Boca's respective presidents, Rodolfo D'Onofrio and Daniel Angelici signed "a gentlemen's agreement" to wait until both sides were ready to play that was the match suspended until Sunday.

"This should have been a fiesta," said Perez, his eye patched up, as he left the stadium. "Instead we came to war."

River coach Marcelo Gallardo said:

Attacked...Boca Juniors Pablo Perez (left) and Gonzalo Lamardo both received hospital attention for eye injuries

Protection...police officers and security guards patrol a barrier outside River Plate's stadium

"We have been shown up as a society."

While the match was delayed, security outside the stadium collapsed. On Libertador Avenue, tear gas and rubber bullets were fired as fans and security forces clashed. At the stadium, thousands of ticketless supporters tried to gain entry. Stewards began closing gates.

The possibility of a major disaster, similar to the Gate 12 tragedy 50 years ago, when 71 Boca fans died in the crush at El Monumental was all too real.

The inquest into what had happened began immediately.

Firstly, and most crucially, was the question of why didn't the security forces clear the streets for Boca's arrival? Why were River supporters so close to the Boca team bus?

"They did not put up the barriers they usually do for these games," said Dario Ruben, the driver of the Boca team bus. "It was a *zona liberada*" – there was no police presence.

The Buenos Aires city council was in charge of security and the city police liaised with national forces: the gendarmerie and the naval prefecture. It was this last force that was responsible for the corner where the attack on the bus took place.

Buenos Aires mayor Horacio Larreta called for a full investigation from the city's security minister, headed by Martin Ocampo. To conspiracy theorists' delight, Ocampo has said in the past that Boca president Angelici is "like a brother".

> "Given the false rumours, I want to clarify that at no point did I ask that the game go ahead"
>
> **FIFA president Gianni Infantino**

Calm before the storm...Boca's bus leaves the team's hotel on its way to El Monumental for the second leg of the Final

The city council admitted there was a "serious failure" in the security operation. Mayor Larreta said the main line of investigation for the attack on Boca's bus is linked to a police raid on the River Plate *barra brava* the day before the match. The police had seized 300 tickets, thousands of dollars and around £210,000 in Argentine pesos.

The problem of Argentina's *barra bravas* has been discussed many times. With lucrative match-day income centred around the ticket-touting industry, there are rich pickings to be had, which rival factions fight over.

Then the focus shifted from the ▸

attack itself to what would happen next.

On Sunday the match was suspended once again, after Boca said they were unable to play, not least with Perez's eye injury. In addition, Boca also requested that CONMEBOL sanction River Plate under article 17, which includes punishments ranging from a warning, to a $400,000 fine, stadium closure, disqualification from the tournament or a future competition ban. The implication was that Boca sought the latter two, going against the "gentlemen's agreement" signed by both club presidents the day before.

Many at Boca wanted the proverbial book thrown at River in payback for 2015, the last time the two sides met in the Libertadores.

On that occasion. River won the first leg of the round of 16 at the Monumental 1-0 but the return at the Bombonera was suspended just before the start of the second half, with the score at 0-0. As River's players emerged from the tunnel, a member of the Boca *barra brava*, Adrian "El Panadero" Napolitano, fired pepper spray at them. River had players hospitalised with burns, CONMEBOL disqualified Boca from the tournament, and River went on to win their third Libertadores title.

At El Monumental after the attack on Boca's bus, Tevez brought up this

Level...River Plate's Gonzalo Martinez (right) takes on Carlos Izquierdoz of Boca in the first leg

away supporters to be permitted. Not since 2013 have there been away fans in Argentinian football – a result of the incessant matchday and *barra brava*-related violence.

Before entering politics, Macri, who is the son of one of the country's wealthiest businessmen, was president of Boca Juniors. He oversaw one of the most successful periods in the club's history, winning 17 titles in total, including four Libertadores Cups and two Intercontinental trophies.

Macri's government now has plans to transform Argentinian football, most controversially by changing clubs' statutes to "privatise" clubs which are currently supporter-owned institutions. And safety is ostensibly another priority. With the policy *Tribuna Segura*, ("safe stands"), checks at the turnstiles have lead to the police detaining over 500 fugitives – including homicide suspects – who have been unable to resist going to watch their team play.

So, when River controversially beat Gremio in the semi-final with a late VAR-induced penalty, and Boca overcame Palmeiras, a mouth-watering showdown was in prospect.

"We are going to have a historic Final," Macri wrote on social media. "Also it is an opportunity to show maturity, that we are changing and that we can play in peace.

"I have asked the security minister to work with the Buenos Aires city council so that there are away fans."

In the end there were no away fans as both clubs rejected the idea, but the president was not the only one whose words would make for uncomfortable reading less than a month later. When asked on television about the possibility of away fans at this Final, security minister Patricia Bullrich replied: "We are hosting the G20, how are we not going to be able to control a River-Boca?"

With no away fans present, and after the match had been postponed by a day due to torrential rain, the first leg at the Bombonera had delivered a refreshingly entertaining match.

Goals from Ramon Abila and Dario Benedetto for Boca, Lucas Pratto and

> "This should have been a fiesta. Instead we came to war"
> **Boca Juniors captain Pablo Perez**

incident, saying: "In the pepper-gas incident they complained that nobody from Boca went to see how they were. Not one of them came to see how we were here."

Comments like this from senior players set the tone among the institutions and the supporters. Many at River recalled how Boca's players lined up in formation to play the second half in 2015 and turned to applaud the stands from where the attack had come when that game was suspended.

The Libertadores Cup Final was a fixture that the Argentinian president, Mauricio Macri, had publicly asked for

Coach...Boca's Guillermo Barros Schelotto (left)

Exit...River fans at El Monumental

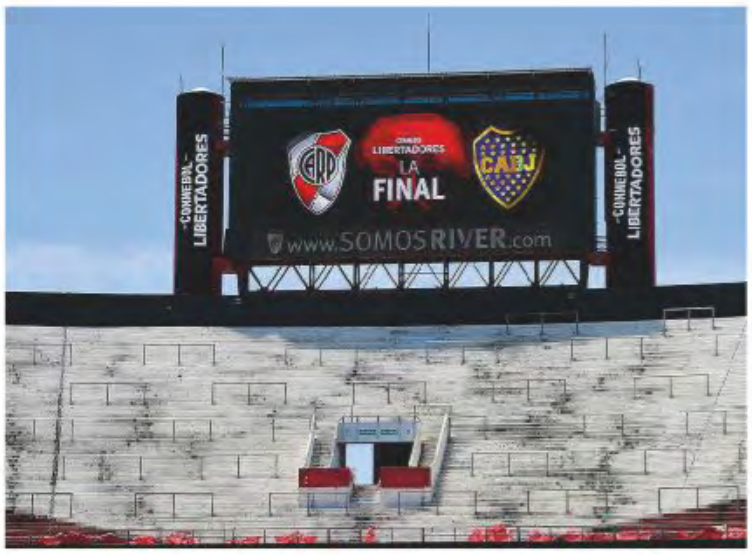
an own goal by Carlos Izquierdoz saw the game end 2-2.

However, barely a few minutes away from the Bombonera, River Plate's team bus was ambushed. Boca supporters threw rocks, breaking the window by back-up keeper German Lux.

The police had been caught off guard and arrived late, firing rubber bullets to disperse the Boca supporters.

In neither leg of the much-hyped "superfinal" were the police able to protect the team buses.

The only difference between the first leg and the second was how effective the assailants' aim was. **WS**



Still waiting...the scoreboard at El Monumental prior to the second leg

COMMENT: Tim Vickery

CONMEBOL left with more questions than answers

Victim...Boca doctor Pablo Ortega Gallo (right) with Pablo Perez

On the Sunday afternoon of the second leg, CONMEBOL president Alejandro Dominguez admitted defeat.

"The conditions are not there," he said, announcing that another date would have to be found for the return game in the Libertadores Cup Final. "We believe in the spectacle. We want the game to be played with the teams in equal conditions, and this cannot apply at the moment. We want there to be no excuses."

This was his acceptance that the match could not proceed while Boca players were still suffering from the consequences of the previous day's attack on their bus.

But it is clear that this was not his original position.

Through Sunday morning and into the afternoon, CONMEBOL was adamant that the game would go ahead at 5pm, as had been agreed the previous day.

And on Saturday the organisation was just as keen to get the match kicked off. A delay of one hour was first announced, then a further 20 minutes, then another 55 minutes. All of these deadlines had come and gone. The match officials were warming up and the pitch had been prepared when, some two hours and 40 minutes after the scheduled kick off, it was made public that the game would not go ahead – not as a consequence of a CONMEBOL decision, but as a result of an agreement between the clubs.

It seems apparent that CONMEBOL would have been quite happy to see the match proceed on the Saturday. The most glaring proof of this is the bulletin from the organisation's medical team. The injuries suffered by Boca's players in the attack were, apparently, "superficial", and would have no effect on the progress of the match.

The recklessness of this was revealed on Sunday, when the ophthalmologist who treated Boca captain Pablo Perez recommended him not to play on the basis that the injury had temporarily deprived him of 60 per cent of his vision in one eye and that there was a risk of infection if he took part in the game.

From this point it was clear that Boca were not going to turn up for the match on Sunday. It was here that Boca introduced the language of "equality of conditions" into the mix. They did not want to take the field until all of their players had made a full recovery from the previous day's incidents.

But theirs is a double strategy. As well as waiting for Perez, Boca are also calling for River Plate to be punished.

CONMEBOL had hoped to avoid the risk of Boca seeking revenge with careful wording of the agreement between the two clubs on the Saturday. The statement attempted to reduce the attack to "one stone" thrown at the coach and it spoke of the incident taking place just outside the stadium's security ring, thereby limiting River's responsibility.

Boca president Daniel Angelici had signed the document, along with his River counterpart Rodolfo D'Onofrio, but this was merely a temporary pause in the old quarrel. And while CONMEBOL thought that the game on Sunday was guaranteed, Boca spent Saturday night and Sunday morning considering its options. After Perez was effectively ruled out, so was any chance of a game that afternoon.

CONMEBOL could have declared River as champions, but that decision would have come across as so outrageously unjust that, in practice, they were obliged to borrow the Boca terminology of "equal conditions" and search for a new date – and perhaps even a new venue. D'Onofrio was insisting that the game goes ahead in River's stadium and in front of a crowd, but an alternate venue and/or a game behind closed doors are both possibilities.

Time is tight. With the G20 – Donald Trump and all – meeting in Buenos Aires, there was no way that the game could go ahead in the first week of December. And the need to have a champion in time for the Club World Cup – the South American champions are in action in the United Arab Emirates on December 18 – leaves just a tiny window in which the game could be played.

Indeed, the idea has even been muted that the game could take place in Abu Dhabi, away from the insane pressures of Argentinian fan culture. This seems unlikely, but it does point the way towards the future.

From next year the Final will be a one-off game in a neutral venue. This change has met with resistance, but events in Buenos Aires have surely given it a boost.

Santiago Solari

Insider gets permanent Real Madrid job after Lopetegui's sacking

Opportunity...Solari has brought Vinicius Junior into the side

Disaster...Casemiro (left) spoke out

As usual, it was Jorge Valdano who put it best. "Under Santi Solari's impeccable suit," he wrote, "there's a ball that's covered in mud."

Solari reads Nietzsche but it is football he knows best. He has no experience some might say, but he has spent a lifetime in the game, inheriting ideas and learning from his family.

Solari's father, Eduardo, was a player and so was his uncle Jorge. His brothers Esteban and David play, as does his nephew Augusto.

When Jorge and Eduardo retired in the mid-1970s they founded Renato Cesarini, a club and football school in Rosario that counts internationals Javier Mascherano and Martin Demichelis among its graduates. Between them, Jorge and Eduardo also coached teams in Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, USA, Ecuador, Saudi Arabia and Spain.

And now Santiago is in charge of arguably the world's biggest club.

It is Solari junior's first senior job and it is the hardest of them all. But that doesn't make him inexperienced – and still less, naive. "I know the world of coaching through my dad, who I accompanied all the way," he says.

Solari has also demonstrated a rare understanding of how football works at every level – from pitch to dressing room to stands, from board room to press room – and at Real Madrid especially.

A former Madrid player, he found a way to survive a model that was designed to force players like him out. And that experience may even have been more useful than the five years he spent coaching in the club's youth system.

From the inside, he observed and learnt. He knows the world he has just walked into and how unforgiving it can be. "We're all just passing through in life," he explains, "and even more so in this profession."

For the previous two-and-a-half years, Solari had been in charge of Real Madrid Castilla, the club's reserve side who play in Spain's Segunda B, and he was given the opportunity to lead the first team after Julen Lopetegui was sacked in the wake of a 5-1 loss to Barcelona.

It was Madrid's third loss in a row in La Liga and midfielder Casemiro called the team a "disaster", describing the defeat as the "image of our season".

The team had previously gone eight hours without scoring, which was just 12 minutes short of their worst-ever run, losing five and winning only one of their last seven matches under Lopetegui. Beaten in the UEFA Super Cup on his competitive debut, Lopetegui lost as many games as he has won in all competitions: six of 14. When he left, Madrid were not even occupying one of La Liga's European places.

> "I know the world of coaching through my dad, who I accompanied all the way"

Lopetegui had been sentenced for some time; the doubt was when it would happen, not if. He stood accused of ceding to player power and the president, Florentino Perez, swiftly lost faith. Brazilian teenager Vinicius Junior became a symbol of the club's doubts over their coach; signed for €45million, Lopetegui left him in the Castilla side.

As results started to go against Madrid, it was only the same lack of time and alternatives that had seen Lopetegui given the job in the first place that kept him in the dugout. Eventually the 52-year-old was sent packing – 14 games into the job that cost him the chance to lead Spain in Russia. Fired two days before the World Cup, in four months he had been sacked from the two biggest jobs in the world for a Spaniard.

Move...Gareth Bale is playing on the left

At first it appeared that Lopetegui's

replacement would be the former Chelsea manager Antonio Conte. The night of that 5-1 defeat at Barcelona, before Lopetegui had been informed of his sacking, Perez told journalists that the Italian would be in place by the following afternoon. But as the minutes ticked by on the Monday it became increasingly clear that wasn't going to happen.

At more or less the same time as Perez was filtering the news through the usual favoured outlets, captain Sergio Ramos spoke to the media in the mixed zone at Camp Nou. Asked about Conte, and managers that rule with an iron first, he replied: "Respect has to be earned, not imposed." He also noted that Madrid's success had come with coaches "who you all know" – men such as Vicente Del Bosque, Carlo Ancelotti and Zinedine Zidane, who all had a lighter touch.

To many it sounded like a veto, but how important it actually was is yet to be seen and there have been contradictory versions of events explaining why things changed so fast. They go from Conte's demands to his ongoing situation with Chelsea to a suspicion that Madrid had not been as convinced as it appeared.

In the same statement in which they announced the sacking of Lopetegui, Madrid named Solari as interim boss.

While Lopetegui was gracious in his departure, Madrid were not as they pointed out the "huge disparity" between the quality of a squad with eight Ballon d'Or candidates and the results. He had not been given much time, but the club would later lament that they had not sacked him sooner.

"Julen The Brief", as he was called, may only have taken charge of 14 games, but his rapid removal was not unusual for his employers. Rafa Benitez was Madrid manager for 25 games, while Manuel Pellegrini lasted 28. Lopez Caro had 24 games in charge, Garcia Remin made it to 12 and Jose Antonio Camacho lasted six – which was still better than the first time he was coach of the club and didn't even make it to the first.

Solari might have expected to last even less time, having been promoted from his role at Castilla, as Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) rules only allow interim coaches to be in charge for two weeks. That meant he was due four games: Melilla, Valladolid, Viktoria Plzen and Celta Vigo.

Ease...Solari has made a fine impression

Solari won all four, scoring 15 and conceding just two, to make the best start of any coach in the club's history.

In the meantime, candidates to take the post permanently – insofar as any coach is ever permanent – were scarce and Madrid harboured hopes that by the summer the situation may have changed for some of their targets. Solari appeared more of a solution by the second.

After beating Celta 4-2, the club's director of institutional relations, Emilio Butragueno, squirmed and didn't confirm that Solari would continue, but he did say that the club was "very happy" with the Argentinian. Solari was also a little coy, saying "all that matters is helping Madrid, in any way and any place you can".

> "We're all just passing through in life, even more so in this profession"

The following day the RFEF confirmed they had received the paperwork containing Solari's new, permanent contract, although it wasn't until the day after that Madrid finally made the announcement official.

Discernible changes under Solari were not easy to identity after just four games, although the absence of Isco and, to a lesser extent, Marco Asensio was notable. So too was his decision to make Thibaut Courtois his first choice in both La Liga and the Champions League, ending the rotation policy Lopetegui had followed.

He also moved Gareth Bale to the left for the first time in the Welshman's career in Spain.

Solari's ease in front of the media was noted, as was his management of the dressing room and boardroom. And that may well be the key – along with his understanding of the club from the inside: an experience which may prove more valuable than many other coaches have on the outside, from Conte to Mauricio Pochettino. Solari understands the pressures from all sides at Madrid and how to manage them.

Valdano recalled how, when he was sporting director, he would meet Solari every three months or so and invite him to leave, for economic reasons. Every time, Solari said no. Amicably, but firmly. He knew that he didn't always have security even at Castilla. Guti publicly pushed for his job, and some at board level didn't rate Solari – but he accepted that and carried on, never seeking more problems than those he already had.

As a player he empathised better than anyone, always adjusting and understanding the mechanisms, the personalities, the pressures. One newspaper called him the trade unionist for the Bernabeu workforce. Eloquent and elegant, he spoke openly about the flaws in the *galactico* project but he lived with it, thrived even. He talked about the frustration, but also about finding a way to be useful to the team.

And so, he stayed. And played. And won. Just as he has again this time.

Solari's coach back then was Del Bosque, a man he says he admired for his ease with the players and his management of people. Like Solari, Del Bosque had begun his coaching career at the Bernabeu as an interim.

By the time he left he had won two leagues and two European Cups.

Sid Lowe

Playing days...Solari (far right) in the Real Madrid wall

Sven Goran Eriksson

Veteran Swede shock choice to coach Philippines

Apart from a brief spell in Leicester at the start of this decade, Sven Goran Eriksson has taken his coaching talents far away from Europe since saying goodbye to Manchester City in 2008.

First there was Mexico, then Africa, then Ivory Coast, before discovering Asia. The third of his three club jobs in China ended in 2017 with the sack from second-tier Shenzhen.

At that time, with his 70th birthday approaching and a long career behind him, there may have been thoughts of retirement. Perhaps financial issues from past investments gone wrong played a part, but the prospect of taking the Philippines to a first-ever Asian Cup in January was an irresistible challenge.

A surprise appointment to take over in October, the Swede became the side's fourth coach in four months. But the Azkals – they are nicknamed after the word for "Street Dogs" – are not as bad as such a statistic may suggest. Thomas Dooley, the German-born former USA international, was in charge from 2014 to June 2018 and qualified the team for the Asian Cup before his increasingly fractious tenure came to an end.

The appointment of Terry Butcher in June was a surprise and the ex-England captain talked about taking his new side to a future World Cup. But he resigned in early August without even taking charge of a game.

"The vital issue for myself was to carefully build a robust plan to meet the football ambitions of the national team and 'do the country proud'," said Butcher. "Regretfully, I've not been able to make this work in the way that I intended and I've decided not to continue in the role."

Sheffield-born Scott Cooper had been Butcher's assistant and he made the step up but was then replaced by Eriksson.

The former US colony is the only nation in south-east Asia that does not love the game. Being the region's whipping boy at the biennial AFF Championship for so long was a painful experience, but that changed in 2010 as, under British boss Simon McMenemy, the Azkals beat defending champions Vietnam in front of 40,000 stunned fans in Hanoi on the way to a first semi-final appearance. So surprised were the Philippines that no home stadium was ready for the two-legged clash, so both games took place in Jakarta – in front of a combined attendance of 180,000.

Looking ahead... Eriksson (second left) and his staff

The transformation was propelled by the selecting of a number of players born and raised overseas but with a parent from the Philippines. The most famous is Cardiff City's London-born goalkeeper Neil Etheridge, who was named in the squad for November's AFF Championship, where Eriksson's side started the group stage well with wins over Singapore and Timor Leste before drawing with Thailand.

> With his 70th birthday approaching and a long career behind him, there may have been thoughts of retirement

Strike...James Younghusband of the Philippines lets fly against Singapore in the AFF Championship

Under the Swede, the Azkals look more organised with his preferred formation of 4-4-2, and beating a resurgent Singapore was a solid performance. There was, however, some concern at how they let Timor Leste back into the game from 3-0 to 3-2.

Playing Thailand at home was encouraging. The visitors, who are the strongest team in the region, led until late, but the Philippines matched the defending champions and were worthy of the point they eventually gained.

While the AFF Championship runs until December, the main focus is January's Asian Cup and a group containing South Korea, China and Kyrgyzstan is a big challenge.

With the expansion from 16 to 24 teams, finishing third offers a chance of reaching the knockout stage and getting there would be impressive. If Eriksson can help turn the Philippines into a football country, his biggest legacy may come in his last job.

John Duerden

Niko Kovac

Pressure mounting on Bayern boss after just a few months in charge

Sub-standard domestic results, precious little pattern of play, a mutiny brewing in the dressing room and an ever-growing gaggle of adversarial sportswriters on his case. After just a handful of months as Bayern Munich boss, Niko Kovac finds himself at the eye of a storm and seeking shelter from a hurricane.

Despite Bayern president Uli Hoeness vowing in October to defend his coach "to the death", Kovac knows only too well that his job is on the line.

The Allianz Arena board are not a group to go misty-eyed in times of crisis, and with the team's bid for a seventh straight Bundesliga title not going to plan, the chances of the 47-year-old Croat growing old there have to be slim at best.

A particular concern for Kovac is the apparent lack of support he enjoys within his squad. Some of the players are hostile

Loss...Bayern were beaten 3-2 by Dortmund (in yellow)

to his favoured 4-1-2-2-1 tactics and would like a greater degree of flexibility. Others are tired of his constant rotation regime, adamant that insufficient match action is making it nigh impossible to work up a decent rhythm this term.

Winger Arjen Robben has not taken kindly to being regularly substituted, while centre-back Mats Hummels believes he is being underused – a sentiment that is shared by attacking midfielders James Rodriguez and Thomas Muller.

Everywhere you look in the Bavarian capital there seem to be signs of player dissatisfaction and edginess. Following a 3-2 loss at league leaders Borussia Dortmund – a defeat which left Bayern five places and seven points off top spot – wide-man Franck Ribery was caught slapping a pundit from beIN Sports. Meanwhile, Rodriguez has allegedly fallen out with the club's director of sport, Hasan Salihamidzic, and Thomas Muller's wife, Lisa, sparked controversy by going online to rail against Kovac's decision to only deploy her husband as a late sub in the 1-1 home draw with Freiburg.

Sub...Thomas Muller (centre) against Freiburg

"More than 70 minutes until he finally has a brainwave," posted Frau Muller on Instagram. She subsequently had to apologise to the Bayern coach.

Another symptom of end-of-era decay is the huge amount of internal Bayern business that is ending up in the media domain, with leaks left, right and centre as the whistle-blowers have a field day.

"If it's true that there are one or more moles in the camp that's catastrophic for the team," declared former Bayern skipper Stefan Effenberg in an interview with the *Sportbuzzer* website. "I would send such players packing. This should be an absolute no-go area."

According to *Kicker* magazine, whose reporters invariably have their fingers on the Bayern pulse, the atmosphere at the club's Sabener Strasse training ground is so toxic that Robben, Ribery, Hummels and Muller are conspiring to plot Kovac's downfall. *Kicker* has even suggested that the quartet have not been giving their all on the pitch.

For such a star-studded ensemble, this season's Bayern have an absurdly high number of match-day failings. Morale is clearly low and it's decidedly unusual to see Bavarian heads drop when the tide turns. They are short of pace in wide attacking areas and central defence, their pressing game is dysfunctional and they are not nearly as compact as they should be, with far too much space separating defence and front line.

> "Pressure is normal in the Bundesliga...I'm totally calm"

Bayern have also become wasteful in front of goal. Robert Lewandowski is often the sole presence in the opposition box, forced to live off scraps and to wait in vain for support runners. Going forward, there is no tempo or urgency.

Surprisingly calm and measured, Kovac insists he will turn things around, saying: "We all have to stick together. From the kit man to the coach.

"Pressure is normal in the Bundesliga. It leaves me cold. I'm totally calm."

Good luck to him. He may need it.

Nick Bidwell

Gerardo Martino

Argentinian set to take charge of new-look Mexico

Speculation has been mounting that Gerardo "Tata" Martino will take charge of Mexico after the former Barcelona and Argentina boss announced he would be stepping aside as coach of Atlanta United.

Martino was named MLS coach of the year for 2018 following a record-breaking season in which Atlanta reached the play-offs with 21 wins, a record points tally of 69 and an MLS high of 70 goals.

If he takes the Mexico job, Martino will inherit a team in transition after the World Cup.

For almost a decade, Mexicans could reel off the most important players of their national team: Guillermo Ochoa in goal; Hector Moreno, Rafa Marquez and Miguel Layun in defence; Andres Guardado, Hector Herrera, Giovani Dos Santos in midfield; Carlos Vela, Oribe Peralta and Javier Hernandez up front.

The generation that had started to excite the country by winning the 2005 Under-17 World Championship in Peru, reached its maximum splendour with a gold medal at the London 2012 Olympic Games and was supposed to reach maturity at Russia 2018.

> The player who the whole country is dreaming about is Diego Lainez

The oldest team in the tournament this summer, Mexico had 13 players with more than 50 caps and 16 players who played in Brazil four years earlier. This was a team with unusual stability on the international scene.

Yet after getting off to a great start by beating Germany, *El Tri* ended up being eliminated in the round of 16 for the seventh World Cup finals in a row. And with the bitter taste of defeat came uncertainty. After the swansong of the "Golden Generation", what now?

Martino is likely to build on the work of interim boss Ricardo Ferretti, who stepped in following the departure of Colombian coach Juan Carlos Osorio. Ferretti left the established stars at home and called up a group of young players for his six friendlies in charge, which resulted in a win against Costa Rica and five defeats – against the United States, Uruguay, Chile and Argentina (twice).

The first conclusion of these games – especially on the basis of a 4-1 loss to a very strong Uruguay side – was that Mexico will need their more experienced players if they want to remain competitive on the international scene but that the future might be bright.

In spite of his 33 years of age, Ochoa does not seem to have any competition in goal heading to Qatar 2022 – in fact, Mexico would have serious problems in the event of an injury to their starting keeper, given that their two alternatives in these games, Hugo Gonzalez and Gibran Lajud both made mistakes in their first matches with the national side.

In defence, the new team will be based around Celta Vigo's Nestor Araujo, who was sorely missed in Russia due to injury but, at 27, seems to be at the right age to marshall the line.

Alongside Araujo in the backline, Carlos Salcedo, Jesus Gallardo and Diego Reyes should be good for a few more years because the options of younger players do not seem to be good enough.

Award...MLS Coach of the Year for 2018

The midfield is where more changes are expected under Martino but also where Mexico have higher hopes of new talent. At 32, captain Guardado has already hinted that his time is coming to an end and his heir is likely to be Herrera, who is entering the best stage of his career. The Porto skipper will also have the responsibility of leading a midfield with players who are as talented as they are inexperienced.

The defensive midfield spot should be taken by 19-year-old Jonathan Gonzalez, who chose Mexico after playing for USA youth teams and has established himself as one of the best in his position in Liga MX with Monterrey.

Marcel Ruiz, 18, has been a revelation with his technique and vision for Queretaro this season, while Roberto Alvarado, who recently turned 20, looked very good as a number 10 in his first game, against Uruguay, despite usually

High hopes... Diego Lainez

playing closer to the wing with his team, league leaders Cruz Azul.

But the player who the whole country is dreaming about is Diego Lainez.

At 18, the diminutive playmaker was named the best player at this year's Toulon tournament, and with his dribbling and pace he has more than a hint of a young Lionel Messi about him. Recognising interest from teams such as Roma, Lyon and PSV, his Mexican club side, America, have slapped a price tag on him of more than €20million.

And Mexico better hope that all those talented midfielders achieve their full potential, because in attack the outlook looks bleak for Martino. At 30 years and after two very difficult seasons with West Ham United, the national team's all-time top scorer Hernandez is close to joining Vela and Giovani Dos Santos in their retirement in MLS and is unlikely to be part of Mexico's future. Although Raul Jimenez is having a good season in England with Wolverhampton Wanderers, the most recent matches failed to unearth a single player from Liga MX who is remotely close to his level.

So the generational change in the Mexican national team is definitely a mixed bag. Luckily for Martino, the only moderately important tournament in the next two years will be the Gold Cup, so his young players will have time to gain experience. On the other hand, how will they manage that without competitive action against top teams?

Martin Del Palacio Langer

Missed...Nestor Araujo did not go the World Cup

Richard Scudamore

Premier League chairman under fire for his £5million 'golden goodbye'

Premier deals ...Scudamore negotiated extraordinary TV revenues

It did not take long for the backlash to begin. A suggestion by Chelsea's Bruce Buck that every Premier League club chip in £250,000 as a £5million "leaving gift" for outgoing chairman Richard Scudamore was met with scorn and derision by fans across the country.

"It appears clubs can stick their hands down the back of the sofa and find £250,000 at a moment's notice," the Football Supporters' Federation said in a statement. "Fans strongly oppose the 'golden handshake' and we urge clubs not to make a decision which is hugely unpopular with supporters."

Many fans complained that the money could be far better spent on grass-roots projects, while others pointed out that 16 of the 20 current Premier League clubs do not pay their lowest-paid staff the living wage.

It was a move that summed up the greed – and the isolation – of clubs at the top of the English football pyramid.

West Ham United chairman David Gold declared: "It's all very appropriate and we're all very pleased. The clubs will support the action."

But the plan was quickly revised and Scudamore, who will be replaced by Discovery TV executive Susanna Dinnage, will now be paid the £5m from central Premier League funds over three years.

Scudamore will keep a consultancy role, which effectively keeps him from working elsewhere – such as for La Liga, who have ambitions to expand internationally, or the Football League, whose new £595m deal with Sky has not pleased certain Championship clubs.

In the eyes of Premier League owners, Bristol-born salesman Scudamore could do no wrong since arriving in 1999 from a similar position with the Football League. Although he has courted controversy during his reign – notably over his advocacy of the overseas Game 39 – club chairmen welcomed the extraordinary TV revenues that he negotiated. The Premier League's TV deal, which was worth £679m in 1999, is currently worth £5.14billion.

John Holmesdale

SPECIAL FEATURE

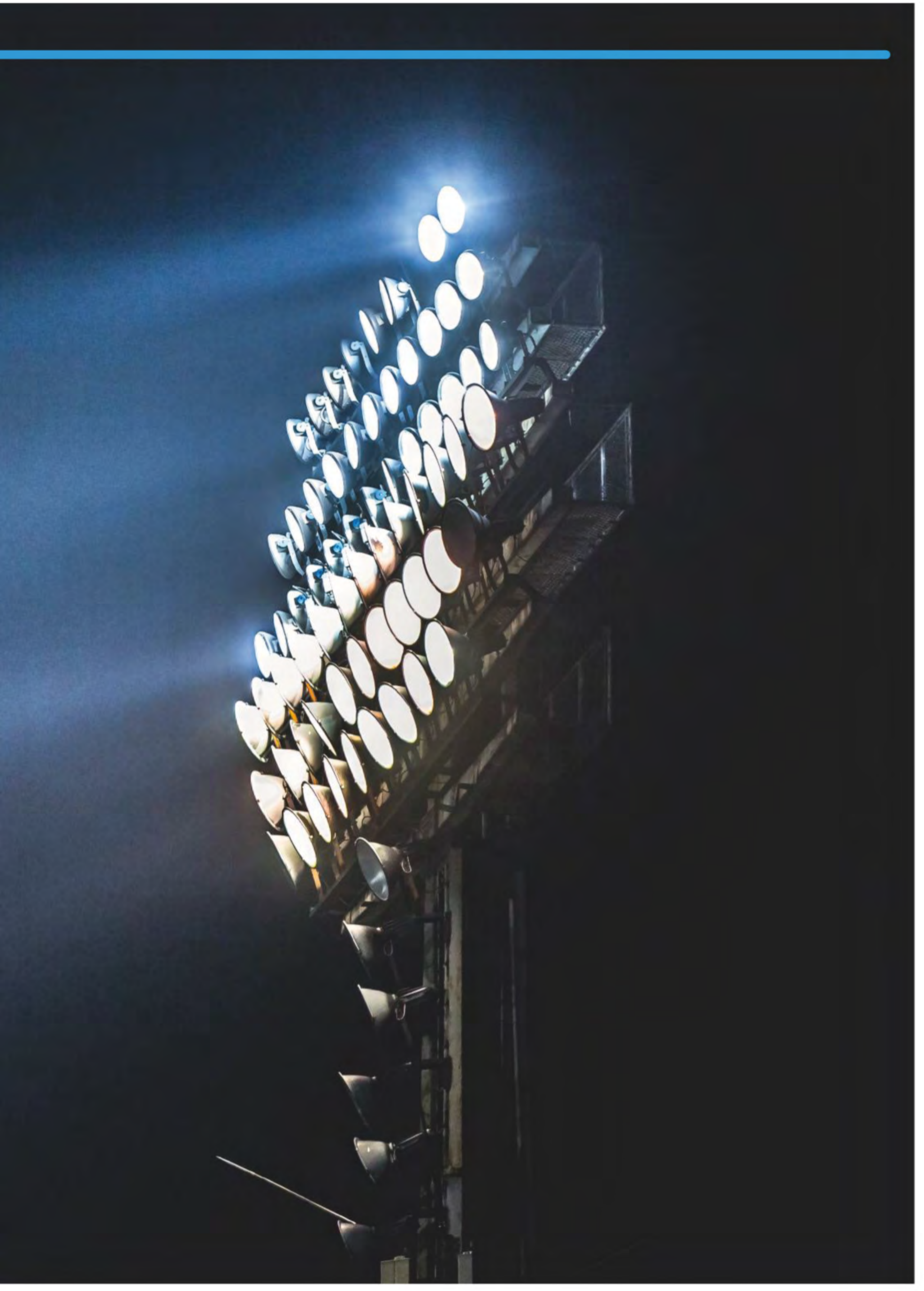
Shining light on football's dark side

WORDS: Keir Radnedge

The 'Football Leaks' revelations have placed an uncomfortable spotlight on the world game's financial chicanery and dirty tricks

Perhaps the worst aspect of the Football Leaks revelations is the large number of yawns it drew from both officialdom and supporters. The themes had long been assumed – and with that came a cynical resignation that the game had neither the will nor the power to control boardroom blindsiding.

After all, the FIFA of Joao Havelange and then Sepp Blatter had used financial finagling as a strategy to run the worldwide game. A fish rots from the head down, so the old saying goes. No reason, then, to be surprised by the "discovery" that all manner of trickery was being employed



Named...Paris Saint-Germain (right) and Manchester City

further down the carcass.

The title adopted by the researchers of "football leaks" is an oxymoron. Football is riddled with leaks. More, it depends on them for daily self-promotion, whether through planted stories in the media or the tasteless ravings of the more obnoxious agents. Indeed, one noted agent took great pride at being named in a book about the transfer business because of its portrayal of his wheeler-dealer "skills".

Football's long-term reaction to the latest swath of leaks depends on pragmatism. An important step would be acknowledging that the leaks – about UEFA, about financial fairplay (FFP), about Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City, about Gianni Infantino – are correct. Every passing day without a straight denial or refutation is such an admission.

Governing bodies and clubs have emitted little more than half-hearted complaints about the publication by 14 co-operating European media outlets of material which had been obtained illicitly to point an accusatory finger at unloved Gulf states – Qatar in the case of PSG and the United Arab Emirates in the case of Man City.

And this is before anyone comes around to the issue of Saudi Arabia's clumsy moves in trying to meddle in the politics and finances of regional and international football.

To start at the top means making the obvious connection between FIFA's ambition to expand and rebrand the Club World Cup and the behind-the-scenes discussions among Europe's elite for a so-called Super League. There are two initial points:

• The current Club World Cup is considered unsatisfactory by almost everyone except the Oceania champions, for whom the December tournament is a guarantee of ridiculous riches (by their standards).

• The creation of a Super League has been whispered in the corridors of club power ever since the late 1980s when then-Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi commissioned a proposal. The outcome was that both then, and several times since, UEFA suddenly came up with new proposals to expand the entry access and cash share-outs for those big clubs that bring essential glitz and glamour to the Champions League.

In this context, FIFA president Infantino was squeezed twice over. First he was taken to task for his proposal to sell off not merely the rights to the Club World Cup and projected Nations League to unnamed investors but all FIFA's rights to a mystery consortium.

Infantino was then hammered again for events during his decade as general secretary at UEFA. Here he was shown to have been involved in negotiating FFP settlements with PSG and Man City, and to have been on more generally affable terms than might have been expected from a disciplinary body.

This may have been the case because of a long-standing fear within UEFA that FFP could not withstand legal scrutiny and that it survives only with the acquiescence of clubs content to accept auditing credibility as a price for competing in Europe. For the smaller clubs this is acceptable; it is the giants that resent UEFA poking an inquisitive nose into private corporate affairs.

After all, former president Michel Platini's idea was to use European competition access as a lever to drive financial security. But no one can doubt the stability of PSG and City – to name but two – so why should they be restricted in how they spend their money? There is an argument that controlling them (and others) controls the wealth gap. But that was never the *raison d'etre* of FFP.

Hence no one at PSG or Manchester City has conceded doubts about over-valued sponsorships in the first case or offshore wages-payment schemes in the second.

The very fact that Infantino became involved in sorting out FFP deals illustrates UEFA's internal concern about the legal status of FFP. UEFA, presented ▸

Leaking from...?

The origin of the Football Leaks platform remains a mystery. Is it one individual (known by the codename "John") or a group, and to what extent have they been fed material by ex-employees of FIFA and/or UEFA?

The revelations were distributed to the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* and 14 European media outlets known as the European Investigative Collaborations network.

Der Spiegel insists it has not paid for the material about the "dirty deals" of the football world.

Story...Der Spiegel

INFANTINO: under fire for secret Saudi deal

Connections...FIFA president Gianni Infantino (left) meets the king of Saudi Arabia

Gianni Infantino's appearance in the Football Leaks series was overtaken rapidly in headline terms by the far more intriguing tales of how Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City had blasted holes in financial fairplay – admittedly, when he was UEFA general secretary.

The documented leaks showed him up as having meddled in the refashioning of the FIFA ethics system but this was not new in itself; he had already set out his cards by pushing through Congress the replacement as judge and prosecutor of Hans-Joachim Eckert and Cornel Borbely by Vassilios Skouris and the compromised Maria Claudia Rojas, who was recommended by a federation president later alleged to have profiteered on World Cup tickets.

> "It cannot be correct that even after eight months we are still speculating on the exact basis of this ominous offer" **German DFB president Reinhard Grindel**

The more contentious issue surrounding Infantino emerged from separate leaks to German paper *SuddeutscheZeitung* about his pursuit of a rights sell-out deal to a British/Japanese/Saudi consortium. Entities named included UK investment group SB Investment Advisers Limited, London-based investment company Centricus Partners and Japanese conglomerate Softbank, which benefits from a significant investment by the state fund of Saudi Arabia.

The deal first came to light last March when Infantino asked FIFA Council to clear him to negotiate a $25billion, 12-year offer for a global nations league and expanded Club World Cup.

Infantino said he had signed a non-disclosure agreement and could not share any further details with Council about what or whom they would be welcoming aboard.

European members of Council, including German DFB president Reinhard Grindel, objected. Infantino's further attempts to progress the issue have been similarly blocked. A taskforce, led by Infantino, is due to report back to Council in March 2019.

SuddeutscheZeitung claimed subsequently that the $25bn was for far more than "merely" a nations league and Club World Cup. Also handed over would be all FIFA's commercial and marketing rights, including those relating to the crown jewels of the World Cup.

This would include revenue from rights to all satellite and network transmissions, archives, movies and videos, e-sport games and merchandising. In other words, not only the family silver but the dining table and chairs plus all the kitchen equipment.

A joint venture company, FIFA Digital Corporation in which FIFA held a 51 per cent stake, would run the business with the FIFA president as joint-chairman of the supervisory board. FIFA and the consortium would each appoint five directors.

For long-time observers of the FIFA of Joao Havelange and Sepp Blatter this recalled the two decades in which its rights were controlled by marketing partner ISL. FIFA was fortunate that, when ISL collapsed, the small print reverted all rights to the world football body.

The "Project Trophy" documentation included a fiercely critical assessment from Marco Villiger, then FIFA's legal director. Villiger left FIFA suddenly in August. Coincidentally, the revelations emerged around the time Villiger and his former FIFA German assistant, Jorg Vollmuller, were announcing the launch of a sports consultancy.

First to object publicly was Grindel, who urged Infantino to "put all the facts and information on the table". Grindel added: "It can't be that every day there are new rumours and speculation.

"It cannot be correct that even after eight months we are still speculating on the exact basis of this ominous offer. It is important that the FIFA president stands for integrity, transparency and compliance."

Then came UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin, who responded to a question by saying: "It's hard to have an exact view on something you don't know anything about."

More specifically, Ceferin added: "Do you see any difference between a private Super League and a competition that is completely secret and which is 49 per cent sold to a private fund and started by secret talks only with a few big clubs? Where is the difference between a Super League and a competition like that?"

FIFA has responded to the media storm by dismissing the report as merely one of many hundreds of such documents and that it was outdated. It added: "This does not allow conclusions to be drawn until a decision has been taken or a proposal accepted."

Supporters of the proposal, notably in Africa and Asia, insist that separating the commercial entity from the governing body would allow a reduced FIFA to revert to its core role of concentrating on competition and development plus unified application of the laws of the game.

After all the expansionist shenanigans under Havelange and Blatter, that is an argument which may carry some weight.

Infantino doubtlessly hopes so.

Investment... Sheikh Mansour (left) with Manchester City's Sergio Aguero

Objection...DFB president Reinhard Grindel

as an inadequate policeman, has had no option but to consider tougher punishments to rescue it.

"For any club the rules have to be strong and clear," said UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin. "We will act by the book, by the regulations. We know we have to modernise. We acknowledge the rules might be weak in certain points.

"We know we have to check the rules and regulations all the time. We know that the situation in the football market is changing all the time. So that's also part of our thinking for the future.

"Do we have to do something about the regulations to be more robust? Yes."

His words suggested there could be no retrospective action. So PSG and Manchester City are in the clear thus far. Certainly in City's case, UEFA lacks the policing power to force open bank accounts or check payment trails. Hence a perception that UEFA can play the tough guy against the smaller clubs but dare not crack down on the giants who make the Champions League a worldwide phenomenon.

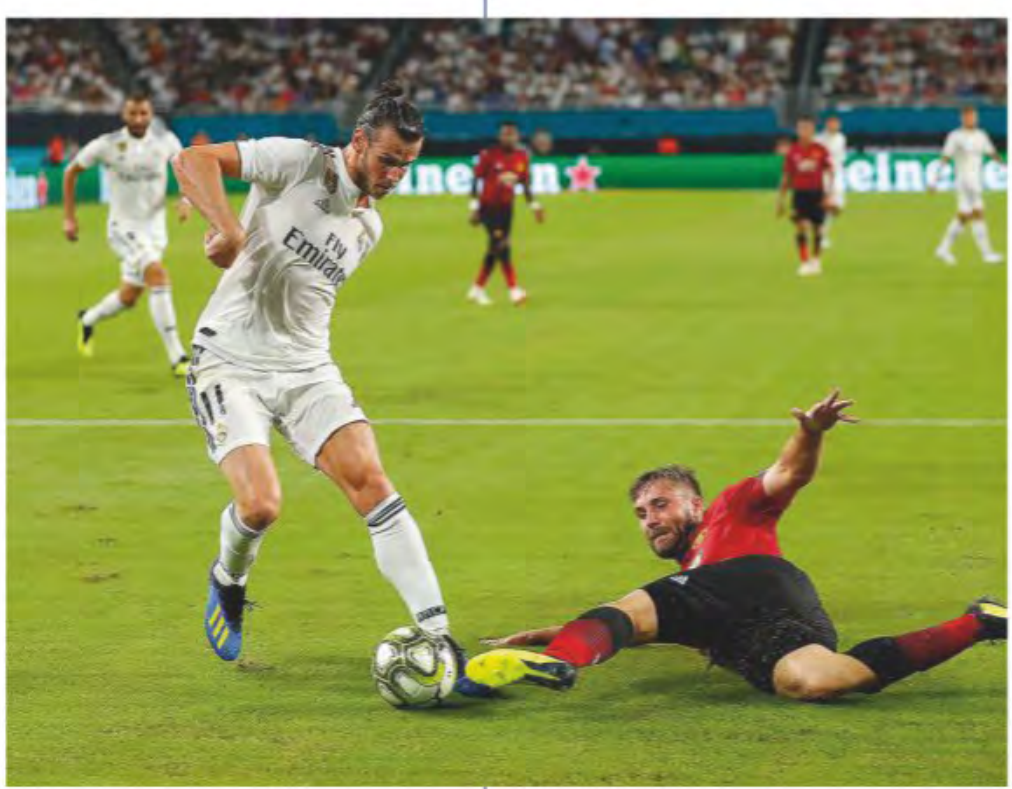
Other unsavoury issues have come to light along the way, including the vast fees paid to agents, the misuse of image-rights payments – a criminal problem long ago in French football and now in Spain – the pretence about bonuses to reduce the core wages commitment, and PSG's reprehensible ethnicity checks.

The problems highlighted are not always criminal. Tax evasion is one thing, tax avoidance another. A thin line exists. Similarly, the sums involved at the top of the game have blurred the lines between practicality, ethics and morality. The world of sport – as so many senior directors of FIFA have demonstrated in the past – almost invites rules-rigging.

The impression left by the recent history of Infantino's late-night phone calls was that UEFA was frightened by the possible consequences of FFP. Now perhaps UEFA can devise tougher FFP rules or appoint more hard-nosed judges and overseers.

Either way, the wider game will expect it to call the clubs' bluff; to make a punishing example of, say, PSG and meet the inevitable court challenge head-on.

At least then UEFA could say it tried its best. Without a demonstration of will it must remain a paper tiger – one clubs can rip to shreds any time they like. WS



Glamour...UEFA wants to keep teams like Real Madrid (in white) and Manchester United happy

FOOTBALL LEAKS: The key revelations

European Super League: discussed by seven leading clubs

Documents alleged a draft document for a European Super League was sent to Real Madrid executives in December 2015.

The plans would involve 17 teams from England, Spain, Italy, Germany and France, plus one club from Portugal, Russia, Holland or Turkey.

The league would operate outside existing league structures, running for 34 weeks, with games on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, with a knockout round at the end of the season.

It was alleged that seven clubs – Real Madrid, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Juventus, Manchester United, Arsenal and Milan – would form a working party to develop the plans.

The documents also alleged Bayern's lawyers examined whether they could withdraw from the Bundesliga and if the club would have to permit its players to play international football if they were competing in a breakaway league.

Manchester City: private deals of Emirati owners

Leaked documents alleged that City created a shell company, Fordham Sports Management, in a bid to circumvent Financial Fairplay regulations introduced by UEFA president Michel Platini.

Fordham allegedly paid fees to players for image rights and was reimbursed by City's owner in Abu Dhabi. This is alleged to have allowed City to save €30million in marketing spending – money that did not appear in the club's official accounts seen by UEFA. It was alleged that UEFA was told that City had not seen Fordham's business plan – even though City staff sat on the board of directors. The project was termed "Project Longbow" after the longbow used by the English to defeat the French at the Battle of Agincourt.

Leaked documents also alleged City's sponsorship deals were "topped up" with cash from Abu Dhabi. In the case of lead sponsor Etihad, the airline is alleged to have paid only £8m of the annual deal, with the remaining £59.5m paid by Sheikh Mansour's holding company.

Former City coach Roberto Mancini is alleged to have received a second salary, for acting as a "consultant" to Al Jazira, the Emirati club owned by Sheikh Mansour. In addition to his £1.45m annual salary with City, it is alleged he received a £1.75m annual stipend from Al Jazira.

Leaked documents alleged City signed an agreement with Danish Superliga club Nordsjaelland, allowing them to recruit African players for free. Such an arrangement is likely to have broken FIFA rules on third-party ownership.

When City signed Carlos Tevez from Manchester United in 2009 the £47m is alleged to have been paid to a private company registered in British Virgin Islands, an offshore tax haven.

Paris Saint-Germain: Qatar ownership in the spotlight

PSG's five-year sponsorship agreement with the Qatar Tourism Authority was officially valued at €1.075billion, or €215 million a year. But leaked documents revealed that "two independent auditors assigned by UEFA valued the contract at...€123,000 per year for one, and €2.8m a year for the other".

According to leaked documents, PSG scouts illegally profiled the ethnic origins of potential young recruits. The club's non-Paris-based scouts are alleged to have listed the ethnic origins of possible recruits in four categories: "*Francais*" (French), "*Maghrebin*" (north African), "*Antillais*" (West Indian), and "*Afrique noire*" (black African).

It is alleged midfielder Yann Gboho, who plays for France under-18s, was disregarded by PSG at the age of 13 because he was black.

As part of the world record-breaking deal to sign Neymar in 2017, PSG allegedly paid €10.7m in commission to the two agents involved: Neymar Senior and Israeli intermediary Pini Zahavi.

Documents also claimed PSG players get "ethical bonuses" of up to €375,000 for applauding fans at the end of games.

Youngster...Chelsea's Bertrand Traore (left)

Gianni Infantino: double life as UEFA boss

When UEFA general secretary, Infantino took a tough public stance against clubs who broke the European body's Financial Fairplay rules. But in private, leaked documents alleged that he played a key role in reducing FFP punishments for PSG and Manchester City.

Infantino is alleged to have sent late-night private emails to City chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak in which he wrote: "You will see that I've sometimes chosen a wording which 'looks' more 'strong'."

UEFA reached settlement agreements with both Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain in mid-May 2014. Neither club was banned from European competition. Instead, €20m fines were imposed.

Both clubs received letters from UEFA's Investigatory Chamber informing them of their punishments. But the letters were not signed by chief investigator Brian Quinn. He reportedly resigned from his post at UEFA because he considered the punishments too lenient.

UEFA, under Infantino's leadership, is also alleged to have ignored financial doping at leading Russian club Zenit, while smaller club Rubin Kazan were banned from European competition for two years despite committing a lesser offence.

> "You will see that I've sometimes chosen a wording which 'looks' more 'strong' "
>
> **Alleged email from Infantino to Manchester City**

Chelsea: under investigation over teenage deals

Leaked documents alleged that the London club signed Burkina Faso forward Bertrand Traore, who is now at Lyon, before he turned 18, thus breaking FIFA regulations on signing teenage players.

Traore played for Chelsea at the age of 16 in an under-18 game against Arsenal. It is also alleged that Chelsea paid Traore's mother £155,000 in April 2011 for a first-refusal option to sign him. A further £13,000 was paid to the club AJE Bobo-Dioulasso, which was chaired by Traore's mother.

It was also claimed that the agreement was an option for four-and-a-half years when the limit for players under the age of 18 is three years.

Leaked documents also alleged that Sten Christensen, who is the father of the club's Danish defender Andreas Christensen, received a total of £600,000 over the years for working as a scout. Christensen joined Chelsea on the same day, July 1 2012, that his son, then aged 15, also signed for the club.

FIFA regulations allow clubs to sign under-18 players if family members are offered employment. However, Premier League rules prohibit incentives being paid to under-18 players or their families.

Agent...Pini Zahavi (centre)

Monaco: wheeling and dealing

Documents alleged Portuguese agent Jorge Mendes received a €9m fee from Monaco for negotiating a possible move for striker Kylian Mbappe to Real Madrid in summer 2017. The player opted to move to Paris Saint-Germain, but Mendes was rewarded for helping push up the eventual price paid by PSG.

Owner Dimitry Rybolovlev allegedly tried to hide his subsidies to the club behind fictional marketing contracts and an offshore shell company.

Vadim Vasilyev, the club vice-president, is alleged to earn 10 per cent on all player sale profits.

A €4m fee for a friendly was allegedly agreed with Manchester United in lieu of payment for the loan of Radamel Falcao.

Owner... Dimitry Rybolovlev

Agents: Lemic, Zahavi, Mendes and Solbakken in the spotlight

According to leaked documents, Vladica Lemic, the Belgium-based agent of Luka Modric, is alleged to have made secret payments to the Bosnian bank account of his brother, Zoran Lemic. Tax rates are considerably lower in Bosnia than in Belgium.

Leaked documents allege that Pini Zahavi, the Israeli agent, remained a key decision-maker at Mouscron, the Belgian club that he was reported to have sold in January 2016. In November 2018, when Monaco were reported to be considering the purchase of Mouscron for use as a satellite club, Zahavi is alleged to have still been the de-facto owner of Mouscron.

Portuguese agent Jorge Mendes is alleged to have earned more than £6m in secret commissions from a series of transfers at Besiktas.

Norwegian agent Jim Solbakken was alleged to have been paid by both player and club for the transfer of Mame Biram Diouf from Hanover to Stoke City.

N'Golo Kante: one of the good guys

According to leaked documents, the Chelsea midfielder did not want Chelsea to pay the fees for his image rights into an offshore account.

6 of the best

Heading for the Premier League

Nick Bidwell on players who might be on their way to England

1 Nikola MILENKOVIC

FIORENTINA

An enterprising right-back for his club but a combative stopper for his country, the versatile 21-year-old Serb's employers will be asking for at least €50million if and when they decide to cash in.

"It's up to the coach concerned where I line up," says the graduate of Partizan Belgrade's youth system, where his nickname was *Blek Stena* ("Black Wall").

"I play wherever I can be useful. That said, my natural position is centre-back."

In dire need of better quality at the heart of their back four, Manchester United could do a lot worse, and manager Jose Mourinho travelled to Podgorica in October to watch him against Montenegro.

Mourinho would have liked what he saw, not least his ability to switch effortlessly from alert reader of the game to constructive ball player.

2 Steven BERGWIJN

PSV

Still only 21, the diminutive winger is on a roll this season, much to the fore as his club treat the rest of the Eredivisie as playthings. He won his first cap for Holland in a 3-0 Nations League drubbing of Germany and has registered on the radar of a host of competitive Premier League sides, among them Liverpool, Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester United.

It's common knowledge that this season will be his last at the Philips Stadion and he has really come of age in the last 18 months or so, improving his decision making, crossing and all-round team play. All in all, he is a bundle of trouble for any defence, especially when cutting in from the left flank and letting rip with a right-foot shot.

A native of Amsterdam, he was on Ajax's books until 14, only to quit following a dispute with some of the coaches and then joining PSV.

"It was the right thing to do," he says. "I was no longer getting any pleasure at Ajax. I found it again with PSV."

3 Tanguy NDOMBELE

LYON

If Manchester City are serious about signing the box-to-box starlet they will have to offer more than the €50million that they had rejected in the summer. With Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas not one to undervalue any of his stable, the 21-year-old Parisian could cost nearer €80m.

France coach Didier Deschamps handed him his first cap in October and says that the midfielder "knows how to do it all". But despite the mix of tackling power, fine distribution and line-breaking forward thrusts, he has not always lived the boy-wonder dream.

Four years ago he was kicked out of the Guingamp academy, allegedly for a bad attitude and a tendency to pile on the pounds. He joined Amiens early last season and initially went on loan to OL before an €8m move this summer.

4 Odisseas VLACHODIMOS

BENFICA

Only a few months after joining Benfica from Panathinaikos, the dual-nationality German-Greek keeper looks set to move on again, yet back in the summer the 24-year-old was not even sure of a place with the Portuguese side.

Only on the eve of the new campaign did coach Rui Vitoria plump to start with him.

Born and raised in south-west Germany, his formative years were spent at Stuttgart and he represented *Deutschland* at various youth levels.

However, unhappy at his lack of first-team opportunities he left his homeland in January 2016 and joined Panathinaikos. Since then he has been in contact with FIFA and has now been granted permission to play for Greece's senior team.

5 Sandro TONALI

BRESCIA

Apparently a target for Chelsea, the deep-lying playmaker is frequently likened to Andrea Pirlo, who also began his career with Brescia.

Although the 18-year-old has not yet played a single minute of top-flight Italian football, boasting just some 30-odd Serie B games to date, he is most definitely a talent. Mature and composed for someone of such tender years, he is aware strategically and boasts an excellent range of pass. Italy coach Roberto Mancini is among those who have been impressed and made him the first Italian millennial to break into the *Nazionale* squad.

"It's almost embarrassing to see this kid show such comfort and natural ability in a central role in midfield," says Brescia owner Massimo Cellino.

A key member of the Italy under-19 side that lost to Portugal in this year's Euro Championship, he grew up as a Milan fan.

6 Ismaila SARR

RENNES

The persistent rumours that Arsenal are interested in the Senegalese winger should come as no surprise, as ever since the dawn of the Arsene Wenger era in 1996 the Gunners have had a soft spot for Ligue 1 recruits. And the 20-year-old is the identikit Emirates Stadium attacker: lightning fast, a provocative dribbler, forever intrepid and a spectacular finisher.

In his two-and-a-half years as a professional he has scored some stunning goals, not least the thunderbolt he unleashed in September's Europa League tie with Jablonec.

An ever-present in Senegal's World Cup campaign, he joined Metz from the Generation Foot academy in Dakar – which they part-finance – before moving to Rennes a year later.

EVONIK
BVB 09
BVB 09

HAIL PAC-MAN!

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Dortmund's on-loan striker has won admirers all over Europe with his goals in the Bundesliga

An ability to roll with the punches is one of the key ingredients in the extraordinary reawakening this season of Borussia Dortmund's on-loan striker Paco Alcacer, the Spanish hit man whose avalanche of goals for club and country has caused ripples of admiration all over Europe.

Just last summer the 25-year-old's career was effectively in no-man's land. His €30million move from Valencia to Barcelona in 2016 had not worked out – yielding just 18 La Liga and Champions League starts in two seasons – and some two-and-a-half years had elapsed since his last cap for Spain. And with Barca deeming him excess baggage, a transfer downgrade was looming.

Once regarded as one of the brightest young prospects in Spanish football, he was linked with such sides as Fenerbahce in Turkey, Premier League strugglers Southampton and mid-ranking La Liga outfits Alaves and Celta Vigo. A fall from grace, indeed.

In hindsight, he would have been wise to resist the Camp Nou siren song. For all the goalscoring prowess he displayed for Valencia and various junior Spain sides, he never was going to supplant ▸

Timeline

MAY 30, 2010
In the Spain side that loses 2-1 to England in the Euro Under-17 Final.

NOV 11, 2010
Makes his debut for Valencia against Logrones in the Spanish Cup.

AUG 1, 2011
Scores twice in extra-time as Spain beat Czech Republic 3-2 in the Euro Under-19 Final.

JAN 14, 2012
Comes on as a sub for his La Liga debut in a 1-0 loss away to Real Sociedad.

JUL 15, 2012
Plays all 90 minutes as Spain retain the Euro Under-19 title, beating Greece 1-0 in the Final.

the likes of Messi, Suarez, Neymar, Dembele and Coutinho. But at least he tried. And ever the positive thinker, he insists he has no regrets.

"While some will suggest that I've wasted the last couple of years, I don't think so," Alcacer told Spanish sports daily *AS*. "Of course, I'd have preferred to have more time on the field at Barca, but as a player and a person I improved a lot. I learned a great deal.

"Working with Messi made me a better player. In fact, many of the goals I scored at Barcelona were from his passes."

After Barca informed him he was free to go he had a simple decision to make: either take the soft option of a non-Champions League relaunch or stick to his guns and hold out for another top-level tour of duty.

Eschewing the idea of a tactical retreat, he got straight back on a thoroughbred mount and signed a loan deal in late August with Bundesliga big-hitters Dortmund.

No one was expecting him to instantly find his feet at the Westfalenstadion. Apart from the huge task of eliminating two years' worth of match rustiness, he also had to adjust to a new league and, crucially, he had missed Dortmund's entire pre-season. Sensibly, the Plan

Barca team-mates...with Lionel Messi (left) and Philippe Coutinho (right)

> "We thought he'd be a good fit with our playing style. Besides being a talented striker he gives his all for the team" **Dortmund's Michael Zorc**

A of new *Schwarz-Gelben* coach Lucien Favre was to ease him in gently and use him in small doses; a sort of watch, listen and learn brief.

However, the Spaniard did not receive the script and in his first three league outings for Dortmund – all from the bench – he would score no fewer than six times: a brilliant left-footed strike as Eintracht Frankfurt were seen off 3-1, a brace in a 4-2 win at Bayer Leverkusen and a glorious 34-minute hat-trick in a 4-3 victory at home to Augsburg.

Six goals in only 81 minutes of action; that's what you call supersub efficiency. Only one other Bundesliga player – Hamburg's Charly Dorfels in 1963 – has ever proved as prolific in his first three top-flight games and he required much longer to pull it off (224 minutes).

The Augsburg match – a topsy-turvy

Deal...with Dortmund general manager Michael Zorc

encounter with all bar one of the goals coming after the interval – was Alcacer at his explosive, time-restrained best. Scoring to make it 1-1, he equalised again for 2-2, and then fired in a wonderful free-kick deep into time added-on to win the game. "Sensational," exclaimed Dortmund skipper Marco Reus, while general manger Michael Zorc said: "Nobody would have expected Paco to have performed so well, so fast. It's almost a modern-day fairy tale."

Alcacer has not only been piling up the goals in the Bundesliga, he was also on target in a 3-0 Champions League victory against Monaco. And on earning a recall to the national team in October he swiftly made his mark, twice on the scoresheet in a 4-1 friendly victory over Wales and then heading home another in a 3-2 Nations League loss to England in Seville.

Hot streaks do not come any more blistering than this. In sports-psychology speak, he was slap-bang "in the zone'".

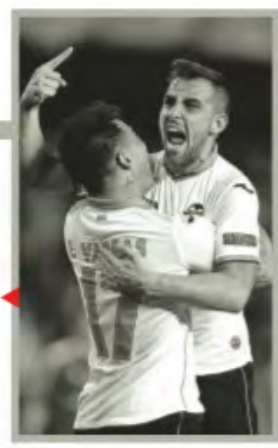
"It's a bit of everything," he explained when discussing his renaissance with Spanish national broadcaster RTVE. "I'm in a good run of form, am confident, have the minutes on the field and above all, work hard every day when I don't play. That way, I'm in a good place when I do return to the fold."

Looking at the nuts and bolts of his loan switch to western Germany, it's clear

JAN 7, 2013
On loan at Getafe, he gets his first La Liga goal in a 3-1 loss at Rayo Vallecano.

OCT 3, 2013
Back at Valencia he scores his first goal for the club, away to Kuban Krasnodar in the Europa League.

APR 10, 2014
Gets a hat-trick as Valencia overturn a 3-0 first-leg deficit and beat Basle 5-0 at home to qualify for the Europa League semi-finals.



SEP 4, 2014
Wins his first senior cap for Spain as a sub in a 1-0 loss against France.

SEP 8, 2014
Makes his first international start and scores in a 5-1 win against Macedonia in a Euro qualifier.

AUG 30, 2016
Joins Barcelona for €30million and signs a five-year deal.

National strike... scoring against Wales

that Dortmund pulled off a masterstroke. The loan deal itself only cost the Ruhr outfit €2m for the loan fee and around €4m to cover his wages. And for the cherry on the cake they were also able to negotiate a cut-price right-to-buy option of €23m. Not surprisingly, Dortmund have already set the wheels in motion to trigger it, offering him a permanent contract until 2023.

The irony here is that early in the summer Dortmund were showing little interest. Number one on their wish-list of new strikers was Juventus and Croat star Mario Mandzukic – and even when Juve refused to play ball the initial reaction in the Westfalen corridors of power was not to seek an alternative leader of the line. Instead, they were tempted to go with an in-house solution: the redeployment of Maximilian Philipp or Marco Reus as a false nine.

Almost as an afterthought Zorc began to ponder the merits of Alcacer, a name he was extremely familiar with. "We'd known about Paco for a long time," he explains. "We'd scouted him several years ago when he was playing for young Spain sides. Back then he'd shown much quality and promise.

"He scored lots of goals and at the age of just 22 was appreciated enough at Valencia to become first-team captain.

"After he moved to Barcelona we continued to keep an eye on him. We thought he'd be a good fit with our playing style. Besides being a talented striker he gives his all for the team. On talking to him that collective mindset shines through. It's impressive."

Much of Alcacer's pronounced work ethic and desire flows from the most tragic of circumstances: the moment in August 2011 when his 44-year-old father collapsed and died of a heart attack outside Valencia's Mestalla stadium.

On hand to see his son score in a pre-season friendly against Roma, Francisco Snr, a labourer on an orange farm, would have been a very proud father at the final whistle. An hour later, while leaving the ground with his wife Inma and hero of the hour Paco, he would be cruelly struck down.

For his son, who was just a fortnight shy of his 18th birthday, the age of innocence was over.

Forced to quickly mature, Alcacer became even more focused on his career. And what better way to pay homage to his father than to aim for the top. His success on the field and his dad's memory remain inextricably intertwined.

Every time he scores a goal, he celebrates in the same manner: eyes closed, his head tilted back and his arms extended towards the heavens.

"Whenever I step onto the pitch and score, I think of him," says the striker, who has the tattoo "Always in my mind, Papa" inked on his left bicep. "Each day I remember him and I'm sure that when I'm playing he's out there with me."

Football played a vital role as Alcacer looked to navigate the bereavement process. Five days after his father's passing he was training at Valencia again, finding comfort in his team-mates' kind words and a return to routine. An article at the time in *Marca* summed it up as "ball therapy". He would make his La Liga debut five months later, coming on as substitute against Real Sociedad.

Personality-wise, Alcacer is a chip off the old paternal block. He is modest, unassuming and hard working, does not especially do social media and has never been one for the party lifestyle, preferring to stay home with his partner, Beatriz Viviana Lopez, and their eight-month-old daughter, Martina.

The scars left by the premature loss of his father will probably never heal. But they have served one useful purpose – rendering him much more resilient to adversity. He does not lose his nerve when the walls appear to be closing in on him; he knows how to keep perspective.

Rather surprisingly for one so talented, he has experienced his share of tight spots. His lack of opportunities at Barcelona; his struggles when Valencia loaned him to Getafe for the 2012-13 season; his battle to establish himself in the Valencia first team on his return; and the disastrous 2015-16 campaign at the Mestalla when the club sank like a stone, consuming four coaches – including current Wolverhampton Wanderers manager Nuno Espirito Santo and ex-England full-back Gary Neville – en route to a poor 12th-place finish.

That was the season Alcacer had his first and only taste of team captaincy, with Neville regarding him as a stronger influence than the previous wearer of the armband, Dani Parejo. It was one ray of sunshine in

Family man...with wife Beatriz Viviana Lopez and their daughter, Martina

SEP 10, 2016
Makes his Barca debut in a 2-1 loss at home to Alaves.

DEC 21, 2016
Opens his scoring account for Barcelona, getting the fifth goal in a 7-0 Spanish Cup victory over Hercules.

FEB 4, 2017
Get his first league goal for Barca in a 3-0 home win against Athletic Bilbao.

MAY 27, 2017
Plays the full 90 minutes and scores the third goal as Barcelona beat Alaves 3-1 in the Spanish Cup Final.

DEC 5, 2017
Scores his first Champions League goal as Barca beat Sporting 2-0 in the group stage.

an annus horribilis.

His decision to leave Valencia for Barca did not merely spawn sporting disappointment, it led to acute emotional pain too, with many Valencia fans turning on a player they once idolised. Shirts bearing his name were publicly burned, he was trashed online and in his first game at the Mestalla as a Barcelona player he was roundly abused. Some Valencia supporters even thought it a good idea to set light to a copy of the Barcelona-based daily *Sport*.

To have ended up as public enemy number one at Valencia would have cut him to the quick. A local lad, born just down the road in the town of Torrent,

Happy...scoring for Dortmund

> "He has to be the best at slipping his marker at the near post. No one can match him"
>
> **Gines Melendez, Spain youth co-ordinator**

he was a lifelong fan of the club and had been with them from the age of 12, going on to rise effortlessly through the ranks of their Paterna academy – the alma mata of talents such as David Silva, Juan Mata, David Villa, Isco and Jordi Alba. He was a living, breathing regional success story and the fans loved him for it. Pity it all had to end in tears.

It's fair to say he did not handle his departure for Barcelona in the most diplomatic vein and was particularly ill-advised when seeking to justify himself by publicly describing Valencia as a poorly run club. Yet why blame him for wanting to better himself?

If this was the messiest of transfers, it was for one reason only: the mixed messages coming out of the Valencia boardroom. First the club's owner, Peter Lim, appeared ready to do a deal. Then the chairman, Layhoon Chan, adamantly told a meeting of supporters that the Spanish international was going nowhere.

In order to save face following the completion of the deal, Layhoon Chan attempted to put the divorce squarely at the door of the player, saying: "He didn't want to be a Valencia icon". In truth, Valencia were as happy to make the trade as Alcacer.

Nor has everything gone swimmingly for him in his international career. Despite over four years in the senior *Roja* orbit he has yet to feature in the finals of a major tournament and would have felt especially hard done by to not make the final cut for Euro 2016. Spain's top marksman in qualification with five goals, he seemed to have completed the hard yards, only for coach Vicente Del Bosque to controversially scupper his chances.

Del Bosque's obtuse explanation was that Alcacer had paid the price for Valencia's domestic woes in 2015-16, explaining: "I don't want to be mean. While Alcacer has had a good year, Valencia have not. The [poor] performances of Valencia have weighed down their Spanish players."

A winner of back-to-back gold medals at the Euro Under-19 Championships of 2011 and 2012, he still has a long way to go to recreate that all-conquering buzz with the seniors.

Part of the problem for Alcacer is that at first glance he appears to be lacking in several areas. He is not especially tall or quick or skilful, is not a potent threat in the air and is no physical beast either. But in terms of the big picture he is a class act, excellent in his off-the-ball runs and eye for space, mobile and altruistic, ever willing to fulfil his pressing duties, and a predatory marksman with either foot.

"Paco has his own unique technical style," Dortmund keeper Roman Burki

Champions... winning the 2012 Euro Under-19 title with Spain

APR 21, 2018
On the bench as Barca retain the Spanish Cup with a 5-0 victory over Sevilla.

APR 29, 2018
Is a non-playing sub as Barcelona beat Deportivo La Coruna 4-2 to win their 25th Liga title.

AUG 28, 2018
Joins Borussia Dortmund on a season-long loan with an option to buy at the end of the season.

SEP 14, 2018
Makes his Bundesliga debut as a sub and scores in a 3-1 victory over Eintracht Frankfurt.

OCT 6, 2018
Comes off the bench with 30 minutes left and scores a hat-trick in a 4-3 win at home to Augsburg.

Skipper...praise from ex-Valencia boss Gary Neville

reveals. "I've never seen anything like it before. He strikes the ball with the very highest part of his foot. He sends the ball on a straight end-over-end trajectory, not sideways."

Applying the finishing touch is in his blood. Goals galore at all levels for Valencia, more of the same for Spain, Dortmund and Barcelona – where in spite of his bit-part status, he nevertheless managed the decent strike-rate of 15 in 50 matches – and a catalogue of decisive end-product for Spain at junior level, notably when winning the Golden Boot at the 2010 European Under-17 finals.

"Paco is a distinct type of footballer," says Gines Melendez, the co-ordinator of Spain's youth teams. "He's always scored goals and that should never be forgotten. I've come across so many young players in my time in this job, but he has to be the best at slipping his marker at the near post. No one can match him."

Are strikers born or manufactured? The Alcacer story makes a cast-iron case for the right genes. "Paco started with us when he was about five and though he was the youngest in the team he was from the start our 'Mr Goal'," recalls Ximo Requena, his coach at Monte-Sion Torrent. "We know from an early stage we had a diamond in our midst. He'd score eight, nine or 10 goals in a single game."

Two decades later, that sharpness in the box is as relevant as ever. WS

Paco Alcacer

SPAIN

15
CAPS

9
GOALS

the numbers game

14 GOALS IN QUALIFYING FOR THE 2010 EURO UNDER-17 FINALS – STILL A COMPETITION RECORD

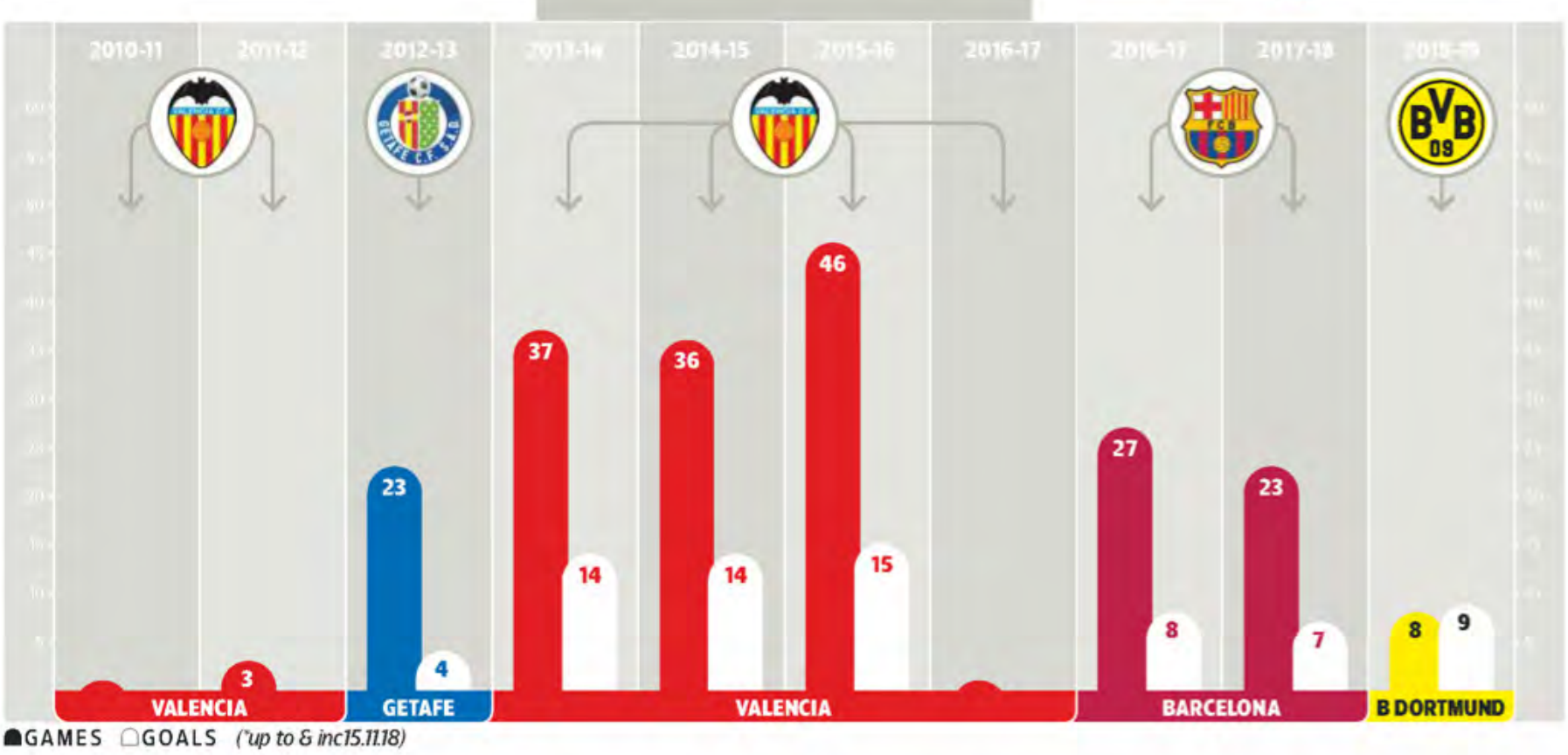
TOP GOALSCORERS
Europa League 2013-14

- 7 Paco Alcacer (Valencia)
- 8 Jonatan Soriano (Red Bull Salzburg)
- 6 Roman Bezjak (Ludogorets)
- 5 Jermain Defoe (Tottenham)
- 5 Kevin Gameiro (Sevilla)
- 5 Olcan Adin (Trabzonspor)

TOP GOALSCORERS
Euro Under-17 finals 2010

- 6 Paco Alcacer (Spain)
- 3 Connor Wickham (England)
- 3 Gerard Deulofeu (Spain)
- 3 Artun Akcakin (Turkey)

HONOURS



TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

UNDER-21 PROSPECTS
Standout performers from the Euro qualifiers

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Luka JOVIC

Age 20 (23.12.97), striker, Eintracht Frankurt (Ger, on loan from Benfica, Por) & Serbia

In a sentence
A ravenous predator for club and country with a merciless killer instinct.

What they say
Eintracht Frankfurt coach Adi Hutter: "Luka is a bombshell in front of goal. He's an absolute poacher. He is doing an incredibly good job for us. You always have to be careful with superlatives, but I do think he has the potential to get to the top."

Former Germany striker Fredi Bobic, now Eintracht's director of sport: "He's an unbelievable operator in the box. The way he is developing is sensational."

Story so far
A star striker with Red Star's youth sides, he made his senior debut at 16 in a league game against Vojvodina and marked the occasion with a goal two minutes after appearing as a sub. He remains the club's youngest-ever scorer, and after 13 goals in 48 games he moved to Benfica.

Failing to make an impact in Portugal, he joining Eintracht Frankfurt on a two-year loan in July 2017, and despite spending much of last term on the bench he still managed eight Bundesliga goals and scored the winner in a German Cup semi-final tie against Schalke.

He became an automatic first choice this season and has repaid the faith of coach Hutter with a flurry of goals, including five in a 7-1 hammering of Fortuna Dusseldorf in October.

Top scorer with seven goals in Serbia's successful qualifying campaign for the 2019 Euro Under-21 finals, he won his first full cap against Chile in June and made a fleeting 60-second appearance at the World Cup against Brazil.

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT JOVIC

- He was just eight when he joined Red Star, ahead of Belgrade arch-rivals Partizan.
- Not long after breaking into Red Star's first team, Atletico Madrid made – but failed with – a €2.5million bid.
- His favourite player is Monaco and Colombia striker Radamel Falcao.

The next step
Eintracht have the right to buy him at the end of this season for €12million. However, Benfica have him under contract until 2021 and there could be scope for another party to push to the front of the queue. Bayern Munich are said to be very interested, while Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea have also been linked.

Strengths
Clinical with either foot, he is strong in the air and plays with an abundance of brawny presence. Technically gifted, he is industrious and works the channels intelligently. Quick on the turn in the box, he is capable of the most unorthodox of finishes, with a spectacular mid-air volley or crafty leaping back-heel.

Weaknesses
At times he can hang on to the ball a little too much and embark on over-elaborate dribbling actions. His pressing game needs a lot more diligence.

> "Luka is a bombshell in front of goal. He's an absolute poacher"
> **Eintracht Frankfurt coach Adi Hutter**

Dion COOLS

Age 22 (04.06.96), right-back, Club Brugge & Belgium
The son of a Belgian father and Malaysian mother – who was a fan of English football and named him after Dion Dublin, the former Manchester United, Coventry City and Aston Villa striker. An Anderlecht academy pupil, he joined Club Brugge from Leuven in 2015.

Ulisses GARCIA

Age 22 (11.01.96), left-back, Young Boys & Switzerland
Now in his fourth season with the Swiss under-21s and captain for the past two years. Born in Portugal to parents from Cape Verde, he grew up in Geneva and is the cousin of Swiss international Gelson Fernandes. Swapped Werder Bremen for Young Boys in August.

Teun KOOPMEINERS

Age 20 (28.02.98), midfielder, AZ & Holland
Defensive midfielder with a fine left foot, he broke into AZ's first team early last season and was an Eredivisie revelation. His younger brother, Peer, also is on the club's books.

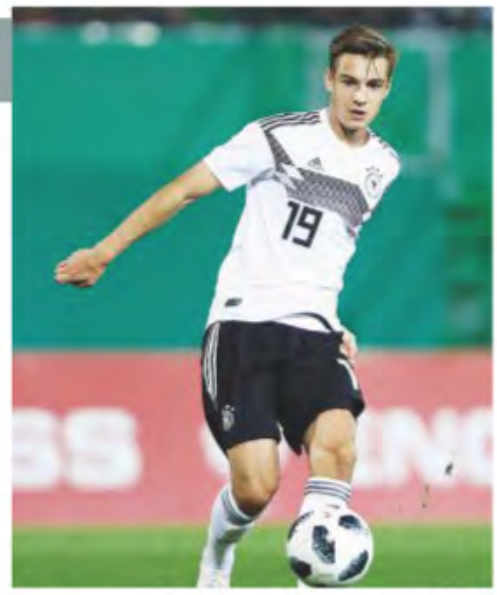
Jorge MERE

Age 21 (17.04.97), centre-back, Cologne (Ger) & Spain
Rugged defender who demonstrates more than a hint of Sergio Ramos in his play, he featured in Spain's silver-medal campaign at the last Euro Under-21 finals, in Poland in 2017, and also helped the under-19s triumph in the continental finals of 2015. He has not, however, had the best of fortunes at club level in recent times, suffering relegation from La Liga and the Bundesliga – with Sporting Gijon and Cologne – in the past two years.

Dawid KOWNACKI

Age 21 (14.03.97), striker, Sampdoria (Ita) & Poland
Captained his country in the qualification process and was also their top scorer with 10 goals. Won his first senior cap in a friendly against Nigeria in March 2018 and played in two games at the World Cup finals in Russia.

Florian NEUHAUS



Age 21 (16.03.97), midfielder, Borussia Monchengladbach & Germany
The creative central midfielder grew steadily in stature as Germany sealed top spot in their qualification pool. His one real failing is his finishing, but he more than makes up for that with his accurate passing and ability to set the tempo. He has proved a sensation with Gladbach this season after a rewarding loan spell last term at second-tier champions Fortuna Dusseldorf.

Andrei RADU

Age 21 (28.05.97), goalkeeper, Genoa (Ita, on loan from Internazionale, Ita) & Romania
Captain of a side that made light work of qualifying, winning seven of their eight games and remaining unbeaten. After starting out with Bucharest sides Steaua and Dinamo, he moved to Italy at 16 and was good enough to be taken on by Inter.

Valentin ROSIER

Age 22 (19.08.96), right-back, Dijon & France
Dependable defender who is a no-frills type of full-back whose main concern is keeping opposing forwards at bay. Only two years ago he was an amateur with Rodez in the French fourth tier. Now being chased by a number of Premier League sides, he is valued at around €15million by his club.

Glenn Moore

Draw pits favourites together

Champions League will have a new finalist in 2019

Repeat...Wolfsburg (in green) lost to Lyon in last season's Final

The throat-slitting gesture made by Greg Dyke, who was then chairman of the Football Association, when England were grouped with Italy and Uruguay in the 2014 World Cup, attracted attention because it was so unusual. Faced with a tough draw, players, coaches and officials normally exude bravado, wary of betraying any sense of trepidation. So it was with the draw for the business end of the UEFA Women's Champions League.

In the last three seasons only three teams have reached the Final: Lyon, Wolfsburg and Paris Saint-Germain. Of the last eight Finals, Lyon have won five, including the last three, and Wolfsburg two. The odd year out was 2015, when PSG lost to Frankfurt.

However, a sensationally lop-sided quarter-finals draw has now thrust this trio together. Making up the quartet are Chelsea, still to reach the Final of Europe's premier club competition and having a disappointing season domestically. They are partnered first with PSG then, should they reach the semi-finals, either Lyon or Wolfsburg, whose quarter-final is a repeat of last season's Final.

Were the English double-winners daunted? Quite possibly in private, but not in public, with manager Emma Hayes declaring: "I think it is a great draw. The best players want to play in the best games, and this is certainly one of them."

Wolfsburg also put a brave face on a match-up they must have feared. While the German champions beat Lyon in the 2013 Final they have lost to them for the last three seasons, beaten in the Finals of 2016 (on penalties) and 2018 (in extra-time), and the semis in 2017.

The Lady Wolves have also been hit by a serious knee injury to Lara Dickenmann which is likely to rule the Swiss out for months. With the quarter-finals not until March she may be fit to play, but it seems unlikely. Nevertheless, Ralf Kellermann, Wolfsburg's sporting director, says: "It's an absolute clash of the titans in Europe – it doesn't get better."

On target...Fran Kirby of Chelsea scores against Fiorentina

As for Lyon, they would probably have preferred an easier passage, but their Norwegian striker Ada Hegerberg tweeted: "Get in! ALLEZ".

While history suggests the eventual winner will come from this half of the draw, and probably the Lyon/Wolfsburg tie, opportunity knocks for clubs in the other half. One of Bayern Munich, Barcelona, Slavia Prague or LSK Kvinner will reach their first Final. Only Barcelona have ever been in a semi-final before, in 2017.

A Barcelona-Bayern semi would provide some glamour for a competition still fighting to be noticed among the attention lavished on its male equivalent, but is by no means inevitable.

Bayern will be expected to ease past Slavia Prague, the only survivors from the qualifying round. Predominantly Czech with a smattering of North Americans, including former Sunderland defender and Canada international Kylla Sjoman, this is Slavia's third quarter-final in four years.

The Barcelona/LSK Kvinner tie might be seen as emblematic of the changing face of the women's game. Scandinavia used to be one of the sport's stronger regions but LSK are the only such team left and the first Norwegian quarter-finalists in nine years. Prior to 2014 no Spanish side had reached this stage but Barcelona have now done so five seasons in six. LSK will be handicapped by the quarter-finals being played just as the Norwegian season emerges from hibernation and might, by then, have lost their goal-a-game midfielder Guro Reiten.

LSK, who are associated with men's club Lillestrom, have wrapped up the 2018 league title so at least they know they will be in next season's competition, unlike Chelsea who will probably have to win the Champions League to feature next term.

At this stage Chelsea's domestic title

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE DRAW

▼ Quarter-finals
Barcelona v LSK Kvinner
Chelsea v Paris Saint-Germain
Lyon v Wolfsburg
Slavia Prague v Bayern Munich
(Ties to be played March 20/21 & 27/28)

▼ Semi-finals
Lyon/Wolfsburg v Chelsea/PSG
Slavia Prague/Bayern Munich v Barcelona/LSK Kvinner
(Ties to be played April 20/21 & 27/28)

▼ Final
(in Budapest, May18)

Out...Nikita Parris of Manchester City struggles to get past Atletico Madrid

looks like being taken by either Arsenal or Manchester City, neither of whom have Europe as a distraction. Semi-finalists last year, City were knocked out by Atletico Madrid, whose cruel reward was a last-16 tie against Wolfsburg. They lost 4-0 in Germany and 6-0 at home, with Pernille Harder scoring twice in each leg.

The last Italian representative went out in the last 16, Fiorentina being humbled 6-0 at home by Chelsea after a narrow 1-0 loss in London had given them hope. Fran Kirby scored a hat-trick in Florence but Millie Bright received a red card. Some consolation for *La Viola* came in the 3,000-plus gate for a match played at Stadio Artemio Franchi. Champions Juventus had already gone out, beaten by Brondby whose home leg attracted 8,000-plus, the largest gate of the competition so far this season.

The other notable event in the last 16 was the goal by PSG's Wang Shuang, at Linkoping, to become the first Chinese scorer in the competition's history. WS

Round-up

Finals...Holland celebrate reaching the World Cup

Through...Linda Ruth Bravo of Argentina

HOLLAND GO TO WORLD CUP

Holland clinched the final European slot for the 2019 World Cup, winning a two-leg play-off against Switzerland. The European champions won 3-0 in front of 23,750 in Utrecht and then drew 1-1 in the return despite Anouk Dekker being sent off after eight minutes.

Nils Nielsen, who led Denmark to the final of Euro 2017, will now take over as Switzerland's coach.

Another spot in the December 8 draw was claimed by Argentina in the South American play-off. Two-up at half-time in the first leg, they doubled their lead in a dramatic climax against Panama, who had two players dismissed. The second leg finished 1-1.

Opener...South Africa (in yellow) beat Nigeria 1-0

NIGERIA STILL FAVOURITES

The Africa Women's Nations Cup began in Ghana with the hosts drawn alongside Algeria, Mali and Cameroon.

Nigeria, who are favourites despite playing only once since winning the 2016 title, were in Group B with South Africa, Zambia and Equatorial Guinea.

The latter had their participation confirmed a week before the finals, having initially been replaced by Kenya after they fielded an ineligible player. They are banned from next year's World Cup for fielding 10 ineligible players in 2016 Olympic qualifying.

The final, in Accra, is scheduled for December 1. Both finalists and the third-placed team will qualify for the World Cup finals.

NEW CALEDONIA HOST IN OFC

One World Cup place was at stake in the OFC Women's Nations Cup, which kicked off in New Caledonia and also concluded on December 1. New Zealand, the only team involved to have previously reached the finals, were paired with Tonga, Fiji and Cook Islands. The hosts were drawn with Samoa, Tahiti and Papua New Guinea.

PITEA WIN THRILLER

Pitea won Sweden's Damallsvenskan for the first time. Gothenburg were runners-up and took the other European spot. Defending champions Linkopings were fifth.

INTER ENTER WOMEN'S GAME

Internazionale have confirmed they are to run a women's team, taking over hitherto independent Serie B club ASD Femminile Inter Milano. Inter CEO Alessandro Antonello said the new team sought "the highest sporting objectives in the near future, as the prestige of the Inter brand demands".

City rivals Milan launched their women's team this season, taking over the successful Brescia outfit.

New...Inter's Alice Regazzoli (right)

World Soccer vintage 53 years ago

December 1965

A tribute to long-serving manager Matt Busby

The front cover of *World Soccer* featured Manchester United's John Aston in action against Tottenham Hotspur, while inside there was an article by Roger MacDonald in celebration of manager Matt Busby's 20 years in charge at Old Trafford.

MacDonald points out that Busby was the only one of nearly 900 managers since the end of World War II to still be with the same British club. And when he refers to Busby as being a "team dictator", the United chief agrees, saying: "I made no bones about it. The team would have to be my responsibility alone."

Saying of the United board "if I flopped, they could fire me", Busby was quick to acknowledge that there was no meddling on their behalf. "I have not met with any interference from the directors," he explained. "I wouldn't have put up with it, and I haven't had to."

As boss of the reigning English champions, Busby had so far won four league titles, two FA Cups and enjoyed two runs to the European Cup semi-finals since his appointment in 1945. Much of his success was based on a belief in youth, though he says he never liked the "Busby Babes" name that was attached to his side. He also warned: "Brilliant boys don't always make brilliant professionals. You might try 100 and find one, but this, over and over, is what we've done."

Introduction...Matt Busby greets the Duke of Edinburgh before the 1963 FA Cup Final

MATT'S THE MAN FOR THEM

A tribute to Matt Busby by ROGER MACDONALD

Last October Matt Busby celebrated twenty years as Manager of Manchester United. No other club in the country has had such an outstanding Manager with such a length of service . . .

Busby's Manchester United will, of course, be forever remembered for the Munich air disaster in 1958, which would leave 23 dead and the manager's life in the balance.

Of that tragic event, he recalls: "I was lost and sorrowing, and for a short period utterly defeated.

"A man's help at such times is not his experience, but his faith and the love and encouragement of his friends."

MacDonald believes that much of Busby's success as a manager can be attributed to his upbringing. Having worked as a miner for £2 a week, his earnings leapt to £5 when he joined Manchester City as a full-time player, but he never lost sight of the harsher side of the game.

"As a footballer I had suffered and seen other players suffer," admits Busby. "I thought I could handle men differently. I not only demand respect from players, I give respect to them."

After 20 years in charge at United, the club made Busby a shareholder. And as chairman Louis Edwards says of him: "He has made a tremendous contribution to Britain's soccer reputation. It is a fitting tribute to the greatest football manager in the world." WS

> **"Brilliant boys don't always make brilliant professionals. You might try 100 and find one"**
> Matt Busby

Also in this issue...

p8 Having won the first leg 3-0 in Milan, Internazionale drew 0-0 against Argentina's Independiente in the return to claim the Intercontinental Cup. But the game was not without incident as home fans threw objects at the visiting side. "I was knocked down by a dirty great rock," revealed Inter's Brazilian winger Jair. "After that I was too scared to go near the touchline."

LATIN DIARY

p14 Gordon Jeffrey suggested that following the club's victory in the European Cup-winners Cup earlier in the year, England could do worse that look at "several West Ham players [who] should join Bobby Moore in the reckoning" ahead of next year's World Cup. He picked out "Martin Peters, John Sissons and, recovered from injury and the consequences of injury, Ron Boyce and Johnny Byrne". There was, however, no mention of Geoff Hurst...

ENGLISH CLUBS ON FINE START

p27 Australia were due to meet North Korea for a place at the 1966 World Cup, but Andrew Dettre reported that the two-legged play-off was in danger of being cancelled as the Koreans "didn't have the slightest intention of sending a team" as "their season was over and forgotten". How Australia must have wished that had been the case, as North Korea went on to win 9-2 on aggregate.

CONCERNING THE VITAL PAIR

p39 In Belgium, Liege players Gerard Sulon and Guy Delhasse were sent off in a game against local rivals Tilleur and banned for three months each for arguing with the referee and appealing in vain "for a penalty which, according to the press, was 'blatant' and obvious to everyone in the ground".

AROUND THE WORLD STORIES

10 years ago

Juande Ramos becomes Real Madrid's eighth coach in the last five years after Bernd Schuster was shown the door following a 4-3 loss to Sevilla in La Liga.

20 years ago

North Korea and South Korea share the gold medal in the men's football tournament at the Asian Games in Thailand after drawing 0-0 in the Final after extra time.

30 years ago

Nacional beat Holland's PSV 7-6 on penalties after a 2-2 draw in Tokyo to win the Intercontinental Cup and equal Uruguayan rivals Penarol's record of three wins in the competition.

40 years ago

After beating Liverpool 3-1 in their home leg in Belgium, Anderlecht lose 2-1 in the return game at Anfield but win the UEFA Super Cup 4-3 on aggregate.

50 years ago

Having spent just 29 days in charge of Queens Park Rangers, former Chelsea boss Tommy Docherty takes over as manager of Aston Villa, becoming chairman Doug Ellis' first appointment.

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Final...Esperance (in red and yellow) and Al Ahly

OCTOBER 25-NOVEMBER 21, 2018

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Hat-trick...Luis Suarez scores Barcelona's fourth goal against Real Madrid

Thursday October 25

COSTA RICA: Herediano take a 2-0 lead from their home leg of the CONCACAF League Final against Motagua of Honduras.
EUROPA LEAGUE: Sevilla equal the competition's record winning margin with a 6-0 victory over Akhisar Belediyespor of Turkey, while Arsenal, Chelsea, Dinamo Zagreb, Eintract Frankfurt, Red Bull Salzburg and Zurich all make it nine points from three games.

Friday October 26

ENGLAND: Tottenham Hotspur admit they will play the rest of this year's home games at Wembley.
ITALY: Zhang Kangyang, who is more commonly known as Steven Zhang, replaces Erick Thohir and becomes Internazionale's youngest president at the age of 26.
ROMANIA: UEFA order Romania to play November's home game against Lithuania in the Nations League behind closed doors after "racist behaviour" in the crowd during a goalless draw against Serbia on October 14.
SPAIN: La Liga considers a legal challenge after FIFA rules it can't stage matches in the USA.

Saturday October 27

ENGLAND: Leicester City owner Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha is one of five people killed when his helicopter crashes in a car park outside the club's stadium after the 1-1 draw with West Ham United.
IRAQ: Air Force Club become the first team to win three consecutive AFC Cups, beating Turkmenistan's Altyn Asyr 2-0 in the Final.
PHILIPPINES: Former England manager Sven Goran Eriksson will take charge of the Philippines at November's AFF Championship and next year's Asian Cup.
SOUTH AFRICA: Orlando Pirates come from behind to beat Kaizer Chiefs 2-1 in the Soweto derby and remain in second place, behind Bidvest Wits.
SPAIN: Celta Vigo striker Iago Aspas scores a hat-trick in the 4-0 victory over Eibar after spending the previous night on a sofa in hospital following the birth of his daughter.
URUGUAY: Maxi Rodriguez scores in injury time to seal the Clausura title with a game to spare as Penarol beat Progresso 1-0.

Sunday October 28

ITALY: The only Serie A side to have conceded in every game this season, Milan beat Sampdoria 3-2 but have now gone 15 matches without keeping a clean sheet for the first time since 1946. Dries Mertens scores a last-minute equaliser as Napoli draw 1-1 at home to Roma in a game played without VAR for the first 12 minutes due to technical problems.
HOLLAND: Feyenoord's Jerry St Juste is sent off after six minutes in a 3-0 loss at Ajax in the *Klassieker*.
PARAGUAY: Santiago Salcedo's free-kick in Deportivo Capiata's 4-1 loss at home to Olimpia sees the 37-year-old become the Paraguayan top flight's all-time top scorer with 128 goals.
SCOTLAND: In the League Cup semi-finals, Celtic beat Hearts 3-0 and Aberdeen beat Rangers 1-0.
SPAIN: Luis Suarez scores a hat-trick at Camp Nou as Barcelona thrash Real Madrid 5-1.
TURKEY: Fenerbahce sack Phillip Cocu after a 3-1 home defeat by Ankaragucu leaves them just above the relegation zone in 15th place.
USA: LA Galaxy lose 3-2 to Houston Dynamo and miss out on the MLS play-offs, while New York Red Bulls beat Orlando City 1-0 and win the Supporters' Shield for the best regular-season record.

Late show...Penarol's Maxi Rodriguez celebrates scoring the goal that wins the Uruguayan Clausura

Monday October 29

ENGLAND: Manchester City return to the top of the table with a 1-0 win away to Tottenham Hotspur.
ITALY: Mauro Icardi scores twice as Internazionale climb to second place with a 3-0 victory at Lazio.
SPAIN: Ninth in La Liga after four defeats in their last five games, Real Madrid sack Julen Lopetegui and "provisionally replace" him with B-team coach Santiago Solari.

Tuesday October 30

ARGENTINA: Trailing 1-0 from their home leg and 1-0 down on the night in Brazil, River Plate hit

back with an 82nd-minute goal from Rafael Santos Borre and then a Gonzalo Martinez penalty in the fifth minute of injury time to beat Gremio on away goals and reach the Libertadores Cup Final.

CHINA: Marcello Lippi says he has turned down a four-year contract extension and will step down as China's national coach after the upcoming Asian Cup.

ETHIOPIA: Defence Force beat Jimma Aba Jifar on penalties to win the Ethiopian Super Cup in the curtain raiser to the new season.

Wednesday October 31

ARGENTINA: Leading 2-0 from the first leg, Boca Juniors draw 2-2 with Palmeiras in Brazil to set up a *Superclasico* Libertadores Cup Final against River Plate.

ITALY: A 2006 World Cup winner, Vincenzo Iaquinta is sentenced to two years in prison for the illegal possession of firearms. His father, Giuseppe, is found guilty of ➤

Semi-final...Boca Juniors' Cristian Pavon (left) and Felipe Melo of Palmeiras

St Helena

STEVE MENARY

Winners...Rovers (in green) beat Chop Shop Boys in the 2017 Cup Final

Saints look to Wales

The South Atlantic island hopes to make its international debut

Few footballers are as isolated as those of St Helena, but with a link to the outside world finally available the island is now trying to raise £90,000 to make its international debut.

Stranded in the South Atlantic, the British overseas territory is 7,250km from London and 2,700km from Cape Town, and until 2016 the only link to the mainland was a Royal Mail ship that made the trip every three weeks in a voyage that took three weeks.

However, a new £285million airport has opened on the island and the locals are hoping to raise the money to send a team to the Inter Games football tournament at Yns Mon in north Wales next summer.

The actual Island Games are in Gibraltar, but for the first time since 1989 football will not feature due to a lack of pitches, so Yns Mon – known in English as Anglesey – will host a one-off football tournament from June 15-22.

In the past, the Faroe Islands and Gibraltar have both used the tournament as a springboard to becoming a FIFA member and the St Helena Football Association (SHFA) wants to follow suit.

Founded in 1900, the SHFA runs a flourishing local league consisting of nine teams, with the current champions being Rovers. But apart from games against passing ships, the island has never fielded a representative team.

After the island's government drew up a new social policy plan in 2013, the SHFA approached FIFA but was knocked back and told to affiliate to its governing body's association.

Nick Stevens, who would be St Helena's coach in Wales, says: "FIFA said we would need permission from our governing country's FA. We approached the FA and they stated we need to be an EU member."

The FA encouraged St Helena to explore other opportunities and a second application was submitted this year. But although FIFA funds six Dutch and French Caribbean islands that are not in the world body so they can take part in the CONCACAF Nations League, no similar help was offered to St Helena.

The SHFA wants to take 25 players and officials to Yns Mon, flying from the new airport via Windhoek in Namibia to Johannesburg and then on to Wales. The cost of flights, hotel and kit is £3,940 per person.

"Although this is a long shot the SHFA is determined to make this happen," says Stevens. "We have already started to contact potential sponsors."

A kit sponsor has pledged £7,000 and the SHFA had raised £18,900 by the end of October.

If the islanders do get to Wales they have no idea how they will fare but the past experience of the only representative side from St Helena at international level was better than expected.

A team of cricketers took the mail boat to a T20 competition in South Africa in 2012 and won three of their seven games. This year the cricketers took part again, flying to Botswana, where they once again posted some wins.

Some Saints have already gone to the Island Games, with Jeremy Henry and Adam Glanville, who emigrated to the Falkland Islands, both representing their new home.

Despite a smaller playing base than St Helena, the Falklands have managed a few wins over the years and Stevens is hopeful of emulating his island's cricketers with at least one win in Wales – if they make it that far. WS

AFC Champions League

JOHN DUERDEN

Antlers triumph in Tehran

Kashima claim their first big continental title

Having beaten Persepolis 2-0 at home a week earlier, Kashima Antlers never looked in danger in the return, and a goalless draw in Iran saw the Japanese side claim the AFC Champions League for the first time.

Having squeezed past Suwon Bluewings of South Korea 6-5 on aggregate over two entertaining games in the semi-finals, Antlers were worthy champions as the J.League recorded a second successive triumph, following Urawa Red Diamonds' victory in 2017.

Watched from the sidelines by former club legend Zico, Kashima's smooth, passing style meant the Japanese side were just a little too clever for the Iranian champions.

"It was a very tough game but my players were very mobile, battled well and I am delighted with the result," said coach Go Oiwa afterwards. "I lost my voice but it is worth it."

Oiwa's side had to balance a tight domestic schedule with a continental competition that included tough Chinese opposition in Shanghai SIPG and Tianjin Quanjian during the knockout stage, but he paid tribute to their Final opponents, saying: "Persepolis were the strongest team we played in the Asian Champions League this year".

He then went on to add: "It is not just the team and tactics, but their fans too, who were magnificent."

Winners ...Kashima Antlers (right)

Second leg...Persepolis goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand clears

And, for the first time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, not all of the 100,000 supporters that packed the Azadi Stadium in the Iranian capital for the second leg were men.

Although only confirmed hours before kick-off, around 800 specially selected women were allowed to sit in a separate section of the stadium.

Signs of change were first noticed in the summer when the authorities allowed women to enter the same stadium to watch the national team in action during the World Cup on video screens, and it is hoped that this latest action could be a major step forward.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino was in attendance for the second leg and commented: "Today is a historic and festive day for football, a real breakthrough.

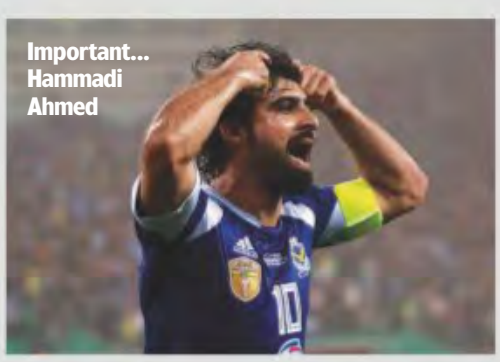
"The fact that over 1,000 women could cheer their favourite team and that this took place during Asian football's most important game of the season makes this occasion even more special. This is the power of football and makes it all worthwhile."

While Iran's national team has been Asia's best for the last four years or so, the same can't be said of its club sides. The wait for a team to lift the trophy goes on, with Persepolis joining Sepahan and Zob Ahan, in 2007 and 2010 respectively, as losing finalists.

As for this year's competition as a whole, teams from

AFC CUP

Iraq's Al Quwa Al Jawiya – whose name translates as Air Force Club – became the first team to win the AFC Cup for three successive years, beating Altyn Asyr 2-0 in the Final at the Basra Sport City Stadium in southern Iraq.



Important... Hammadi Ahmed

Hammadi Ahmed and Ibrahim Bayesh scored for the Iraqis, while Selim Nurmuradov missed a penalty late on for the visitors, who were the first Turkmenistan team to reach the Final.

Following on from victories over Tajikistan's Istiklol last year and Bengaluru of India in 2016, the Iraqi club have now also equalled Al Kuwait's record haul of three AFC Cup titles.

Ahmed, who played in the two previous Finals and scored against Bengaluru in 2016, called this year's goal "the most important of my career because I scored in the Final as the team captain".

Progress...female fans in attendance at the second leg of the Final in Iran

the Chinese Super League were disappointing, despite boasting stars such as Hulk, Alexandre Pato, Axel Witsel and Oscar.

There were also less-than-convincing performances from sides representing Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – the best two performing countries from the western half of the continent of late. Al Duhail of Qatar had looked the west's strongest side this term but they fell by the wayside, while fellow Qataris Al Sadd, with Xavi in midfield, were beaten by Persepolis in the semi-finals.

Since Al Ittihad of Saudi Arabia won the title in 2005, the trophy has left east Asia only once, when Al Sadd triumphed in 2011.

But while there have been several Finals in which western teams have been unlucky, this year's was not one of them. WS

affiliation to the 'Ndrangheta – an organised crime group in Calabria – and will serve 19 years in prison.

SOUTH KOREA: Ulsan Hyundai will meet Daegu in December's Korea FA Cup Final after both win 2-1 in their semi-finals, against Suwon Bluewings and Jeonnam Dragons respectively.

SPAIN: Real Sociedad's 23-year-old midfielder Luca Sangalli is hospitalised after suffering a stroke.

VENEZUELA: Zulia beat Aragua 3-1 on aggregate to win the Venezuelan Cup for a second time.

Thursday November 1

COLOMBIA: Atletico Nacional win the Colombia Cup for the fourth time in seven years, beating Once Caldas 4-3 on aggregate.

COSTA RICA: Herediano win the CONCACAF League Final, beating Motagua of Honduras 3-2 on aggregate to qualify for next year's CONCACAF Champions League.

SOUTH KOREA: Jang Hyun-soo, a 27-year-old defender who has won 58 caps, is banned from playing for the national team for life after faking community service records in order to avoid military service.

USA: Wayne Rooney misses his spot-kick as DC United are knocked out of the MLS play-offs on penalties by Columbus Crew.

Friday November 2

AUSTRALIA: Central Coast Mariners announce that Usain Bolt's trial has come to an end and Jamaica's eight-time Olympic sprint champion will not be offered a playing contract.

DENMARK: International striker Nicklas Bendtner, who plays for Rosenborg in Norway, is sentenced to 50 days in jail for assaulting a taxi driver in Copenhagen. He is later released on appeal until a second hearing.

EGYPT: Al Ahly beat Tunisian side Esperance 3-1 in their home leg of the CAF Champions League Final.

FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain beat Lille 2-1 to become the first team to win all 12 of their opening games in one of Europe's top five leagues.

TURKEY: Galatasaray's Badou Ndiaye and Fenerbahce's Roberto Soldado and Jailson are sent off after the final whistle following a 30-man brawl involving players and staff from both sides as the Istanbul derby ends in a 2-2 draw.

Saturday November 3

ENGLAND: Liverpool draw 1-1 at Arsenal with a 50th Premier League goal from James Milner, who is yet to be on the losing side in the competition when he scores.

GREECE: PAOK drop their first points of the season with a 1-1 draw at second-placed Atromitos, while Panathinaikos and AEK draw 0-0 in the Athens derby.

JAPAN: Goals from Leo Silva and Serginho give Kashima Antlers a 2-0 lead over Persepolis of Iran after their home leg of the AFC Champions League Final.

SCOTLAND: League leaders Hearts lose 5-0 at Celtic.

Sunday November 4

PARAGUAY: A week after making his debut, 14-year-old Fernando Ovelar scores Cerro Porteno's opening goal in a 2-2 draw against Olimpia in the *Superclasico*.

SAUDI ARABIA: A 2-1 victory over South Korea sees Saudi Arabia win the AFC Under-19 title for a third time. Both finalists, along with semi-finalists Qatar and Japan, qualify for next year's Under-20 World Cup in Poland.

Monday November 5

ENGLAND: Liverpool omit Xherdan Shaqiri – an ethnic Albanian from Kosovo – from their squad to face Serbian side Red Star Belgrade in the Champions League on Tuesday to "avoid any distractions" that may be caused by the Switzerland international's heritage.

Tuesday November 6

FRANCE: Bottom of the league, Guingamp sack Antoine Kombouare and put Sylvain Didot and Vincent Rautureau in temporary control. US investment fund GACP completes a €100million takeover of Bordeaux.

ITALY: Empoli appoint Giuseppe Iachini as coach, the day after sacking Aurelio Andreazzoli on his 65th birthday. Marek Hamsik makes a record 512th appearance for Napoli as they draw 1-1 with Paris Saint-Germain.

SERBIA: Red Star beat Liverpool 2-0 in Belgrade to become the first Serbian side to win a Champions League group game.

SPAIN: Barcelona draw 1-1 away to Internazionale and are the first team to reach the knockout stage of the Champions League.

Wednesday November 7

CHINA: Shanghai SIPG beat Beijing Renhe 2-1 to win their first title and end Guangzhou Evergrande's run of seven successive Chinese Super League championships.

ENGLAND: Trailing 1-0 with four minutes remaining, Manchester

➤ United win 2-1 at Juventus in the Champions League. Gabriel Jesus gets a hat-trick as Manchester City beat Shakhtar Donetsk 6-0.
GERMANY: Robert Lewandowski marks his 100th game in UEFA club competition with both goals as Bayern Munich beat AEK 2-0.
LITHUANIA: Suduva retain their league title with a 6-0 victory at home to Atlantas.

Thursday November 8

AFF CHAMPIONSHIP: Malaysia get the tournament underway with a 1-0 victory over Cambodia.
EUROPA LEAGUE: Arsenal, Bayer Leverkusen, Chelsea, Dinamo Zagreb, Eintracht Frankfurt, Lazio and Zurich all qualify for the round of 32 with two games to spare.
FRANCE: Guingamp announce Jocelyn Gourvennec will return to the club as coach, having left to take charge of Bordeaux in 2016.
TURKEY: Fenerbahce's Jailson and Roberto Soldado are given eight- and six-match bans respectively following a brawl in last Friday's Istanbul derby, while Galatasaray's Ryan Donk gets six games, with team-mates Badou Ndiaye and Garry Rodrigues given five and three-game suspensions. Gala boss Faith Terim is handed a seven-match ban while his assistant Hasan Sas gets eight games.
USA: Louisville City beat Phoenix Rising, who include co-owner Didier Drogba in their side, 1-0 in the United Soccer League Cup Final.

Friday November 9

TUNISIA: Trailing 3-1 from the first leg in Egypt, Esperance beat Al Ahly 3-0 to clinch their third CAF Champions League crown.

Saturday November 10

ESTONIA: League leaders Flora lose 2-1 at Levadia, which allows Nomme Kalju to leapfrog them and win the league with a 4-1 victory over Trans.
GERMANY: Borussia Dortmund twice come from behind in *Der Klassiker* to beat defending champions Bayern Munich 3-2 and remain top of the Bundesliga.
HOLLAND: PSV make it 12 wins from 12 league games with a 4-1 victory away to De Graafschap.
JAPAN: Kashima Antlers draw 0-0 with Persepolis in Iran to win 2-0 on aggregate and claim their first AFC Champions League title. In the J.League, Kawasaki Frontale retain their title despite losing 2-1 to

Libertadores Cup

TIM VICKERY

Conspiracy theories abound

Brazilians reflect on knockout failures

In 2016 the Libertadores Cup Final was between Atletico Nacional of Colombia and Independiente del Valle, a tiny club from Ecuador. Then came the reorganisation. As of last year, Brazil and Argentina had more places. They were also favoured by a huge change that saw the competition played from January to November, rather than being squeezed into the first half of the year. This extension clearly benefits the teams with the deepest pockets – meaning those who can retain the strongest squads or replace their losses in the mid-year transfer window.

Last year's Final was a Brazil v Argentina affair and the big two enjoyed complete domination again this term. Between them, Brazil and Argentina supplied 12 of the last 16, and seven of the last eight – the exception being Colo Colo of Chile, who snuck past a decimated Corinthians before being swatted away by Palmeiras.

The Final, of course, was an all-Argentinian match up and this left the Brazilians snarling and grumbling, complaining that the competition was an Argentinian plot – the competition stained by administrative chaos, with Brazilian clubs feeling again and again that they had been given the short end of the stick.

Much of the confusion was about suspended players, with CONMEBOL admitting an inability to keep a record of those ineligible for selection.

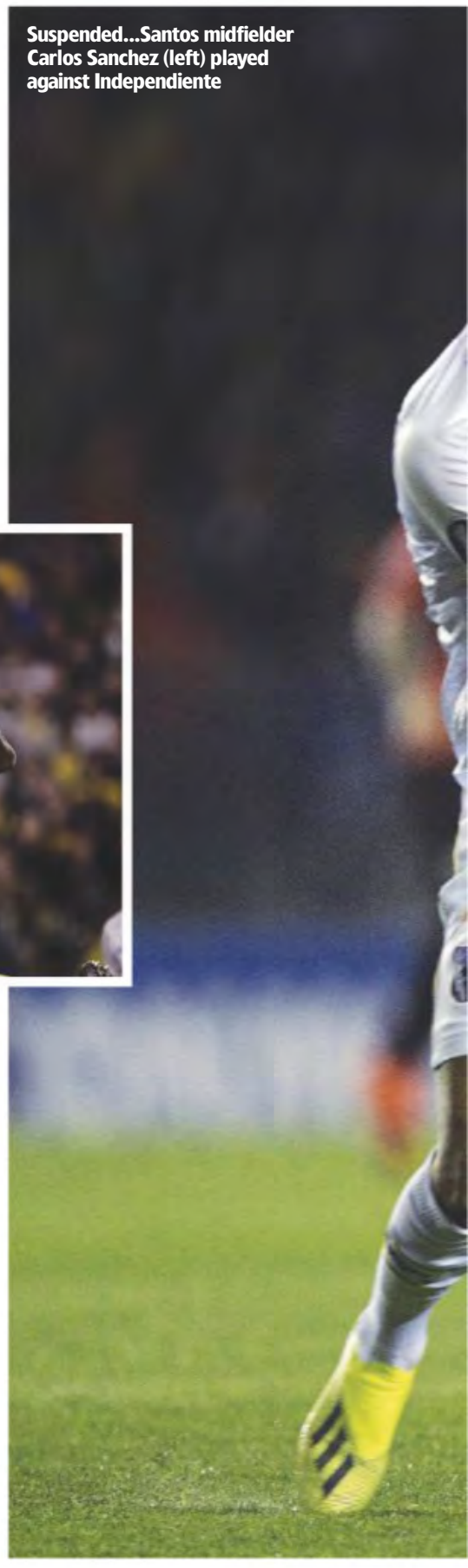
In this year's round of 16, Santos of Brazil were penalised for fielding Uruguayan World Cup midfielder Carlos Sanchez, a recent signing from Mexican side Monterrey who was still carrying a suspension from a previous spell in South America and who should not have played against Argentina's Independiente. As a result a 0-0 away draw was turned into a 3-0 defeat.

Painful...Cruzeiro's Dede collides with Boca keeper Esteban Andrada

It then emerged that River Plate's Bruno Zuculini and Ramon Abila of Boca Juniors had also been playing when they should have been suspended. The Brazilians were outraged when no action was taken in these two cases, but there was a legal explanation.

According to the rules, in such cases it is up to the opposing team to lodge a protest within 24 hours. But while Independiente did this, the opponents of River and Boca did not.

There were other complaints, too. In the quarter-finals Cruzeiro were unhappy with a red card awarded to their centre-back Dede, who broke the jaw of Boca keeper Esteban Andrada in a collision at a corner. The red card was later rescinded, but Dede's absence for the last few minutes of the first leg was a clear factor



Suspended...Santos midfielder Carlos Sanchez (left) played against Independiente

Cerezo Osaka as their closest challengers Sanfrecce Hiroshima go down 1-0 to Vegalta Sendai.

Sunday November 11

ARGENTINA: Postponed for 24 hours after heavy rain, River Plate twice come from behind to draw 2-2 at Boca Juniors in the first leg of the Libertadores Cup Final.
ENGLAND: Manchester City win 3-1 at home to Manchester United and top the table.
FRANCE: Edinson Cavani gets a hat-trick as Paris Saint-Germain win 4-0 at Monaco to move 13 points clear at the top of Ligue 1.
ITALY: On-loan Gonzalo Higuain misses a penalty and is sent off against his parent club as Milan lose 2-0 at home to Juventus.
RUSSIA: CSKA beat Zenit for the first time since March 2014, winning 2-0 against the league leaders.
SPAIN: Barcelona lose at home in La Liga for the first time in two years, beaten 4-3 by Real Betis.
SWEDEN: AIK are crowned league champions for the first time since 2009 with a 1-0 win over Kalmar.

Monday November 12

SPAIN: Celta Vigo sack coach Antonio Mohamed and replace him with Miguel Cardoso after a poor start to the season.
SWEDEN: Manchester United defender Victor Lindelof is named Sweden's player of the year.

Tuesday November 13

ENGLAND: Championship club Brentford announce that their technical director, Robert Rowan, has died at the age of just 28.
ITALY: Chievo accept coach Giampiero Ventura's resignation and re-appoint former boss Domenico Di Carlo. Davide Nicola replaces Julio Velazquez at Udinese.
SPAIN: Having won all four games as caretaker coach, Real Madrid hand Santiago Solari a two-and-a-half-year permanent deal.
USA: Tampa Bay Rowdies' former England midfielder Joe Cole announces his retirement at 37.

Wednesday November 14

CECAFA: The Council for East and Central Africa Football Associations cancels its CECAFA Cup, which was scheduled to start later in the month, after Zanzibar and then Kenya withdrew as the host nation.
ENGLAND: Currently bottom of the Premier League, Fulham sack Slavisa Jokanovic and appoint ➤

Protest...Gremio confront the referee after losing to River Plate

in the second goal of Boca's 2-0 win.

In the semi-finals the reigning champions Gremio lost on away goals to River Plate. Seemingly with a foot and a half in the Final, Gremio conceded twice in the last 10 minutes, with the decisive goal coming from a Gonzalo Martinez penalty that was awarded when the video referee spotted a hand ball despite no one on the pitch appealing for it. Although Gremio had no complaints about that decision, they were angry about the first goal, in which VAR did not intervene when the ball may have brushed the arm as well as the head of Rafael Santos Borre.

> **The competition was stained by administrative chaos, with Brazilian clubs feeling again and again that they had been given the short end of the stick**

Gremio were further incensed by the conduct of River coach Marcelo Gallardo. In the first leg his side came out late for the second half and as a punishment he was banned from coaching his side in the return game. But Gallardo took no notice and went into the dressing room at half-time to give a team talk. An official protest was lodged, but CONMEBOL judged that Gallardo, and not River Plate, should be punished, so the Argentinian club did not lose its place in the Final.

However, rather than obsessing on conspiracy theories, Brazil's club sides would be better advised to dwell on their own failings. One finalist in the last five years points to a story of continued underachievement – and it was striking that all of the Brazilian teams this year fell in the same way, with an overdose of caution and an insufficiency of courage. WS

➤ Claudio Ranieri as manager.

Thursday November 15

ENGLAND: Premier League clubs agree in principle to VAR being used as of next season. Wayne Rooney wins his 120th and final cap in a 3-0 victory over the USA, in which Callum Wilson scores on his debut, as Lewis Dunk and Alex McCarthy also win their first caps.
ITALY: Croatia defender Ivan Strinic, who hasn't played since joining Milan from Sampdoria in July, is cleared to start training after three months out with a heart problem.
UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE: Bosnia secure promotion from League B with a goalless draw in Austria – a result that relegates Northern Ireland. Finland lose 1-0 away to Greece but are still promoted from League C, while Estonia lose 2-0 in Hungary and are demoted to League D.

Friday November 16

BRAZIL: Napoli midfielder Allan makes his debut in a 1-0 friendly win against Uruguay but remains eligible for both Italy and Portugal.
BULGARIA: Georgi Petkov plays in the 0-0 Nations League draw with Cyprus at the age of 42 years, eight months and two days – nine years after his previous cap for the national side.
UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE: In League A, Holland beat France 2-0 to relegate Germany, who will be replaced by Denmark, whose 2-1 win in Wales relegates Republic of Ireland. In League C, Slovenia are relegated with a 1-1 draw at home to Norway.

Saturday November 17

CHILE: Forty years after they last won the Chilean Cup, Palestino lift the trophy again, beating Audax Italiano 4-2 on aggregate.
UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE: Portugal draw 0-0 with Italy and become the first team to qualify for the semi-finals. Turkey are relegated from League B, Albania and Lithuania go down from League C.

Sunday November 18

HONDURAS: Oscar Munguia, a goalkeeper with top-flight side CD Vida, is shot dead following an argument at a hotel in the city of La Ceiba.
MAURITANIA: Ismael Diakite scores the winner as Mauritania beat Botswana 2-1 to qualify for the African Nations Cup finals for the first time.
SPAIN: Celta Vigo midfielder ➤

Esperance hold their nerve

Tunisians win a third African title

It took a storming recovery to turn around the outcome of this year's CAF Champions League Final, but Tunisian side Esperance were able to set aside their nerves and inferiority complex to beat record-holders Al Ahly of Egypt and be crowned champions of Africa.

A thrilling 3-0 home win in the return game in Tunis overturned a 3-1 deficit from a controversy-laden first leg in Alexandria and condemned the eight-time winners to the runners-up spot for a second successive year.

The Egyptians established a two-goal advantage at the Borg El Arab Stadium thanks to two controversial penalties, both confirmed by Algerian referee Mehdi Abid Charef after checking with the VAR.

And at the heart of both was Ahly's Walid Azaro, who dived to win the first spot-kick, then tore his own shirt in an effort to con the officials for the second.

Walid Soliman opened the scoring after Esperance keeper Moez Ben Cherifia bought down Azaro in the first half and Amr Elsoulia doubled the host's lead just before the hour mark. Youcef Belaili then replied with a penalty of his own for what would prove to be a vital consolation for the Tunisians.

Soliman's second spot-kick for Ahly was awarded when an Esperance defender clashed with Azaro in the penalty area. After consulting with VAR, the referee once again pointed to the spot, but he missed the Moroccan striker tearing at his own shirt to make the incident look a lot worse.

Clash...Al Ahly's Walid Azaro goes down under a challenge from Esperance keeper Moez Ben Cherifia

Victorious...two-goal Saad Bguir (right) and Taha Yassine Khenissi

In the wake of the first leg, pictures of Azaro ripping his shirt spread on social media and the Confederation of African Football banned him from the return game. The errant official was also removed, but CAF refused to overturn bookings for Esperance captain Chamseddine Dhaoudi and key midfielder Franck Kom which meant they were suspended for the second leg.

Seven days later at the Stade Olympique de Rades on the outskirts of the capital Tunis, the home side were slow to find their rhythm but came alive on the stroke of half-time as Saad Bguir, who had barely featured in the group phase, ghosted in to turn home a pass from Taha Yassine Khenissi.

Bguir got his second in the 53rd minute after winning possession in midfield and then heading home Mohamed Ali Yaccoubi's cross.

Looking to avenge their 3-2 aggregate defeat by Ahly in the 2012 Final,

Esperance swept forward and confirmed victory with four minutes left to play as the competition's top scorer Anice Badri got his eighth goal.

Esperance, who will represent Africa at the Club World Cup, are now guaranteed a spot in the group phase of the next Champions League, which began at the end of November as the calendar changed from a February-to-November schedule to August-to-May. The Final of the transitional tournament will be in May 2019. WS

Goal...Anice Badri seals the result

➤ Brais Mendez makes his debut as a sub and scores the only goal in a friendly win over Bosnia.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE: England and Switzerland both come from behind, against Croatia and Belgium respectively, to reach the semi-finals. Croatia drop down to League B, while Belarus are promoted to League C with a 2-0 victory away to San Marino.

VENEZUELA: Deportivo La Guaira draw 0-0 away to Deportivo Lara in the first leg of the Clausura Final.

Monday November 19

AUSTRALIA: Chris Nikou replaces Steven Lowy as Football Federation Australia chairman.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE: Holland score twice in the last five minutes to draw 2-2 in Germany and claim a semi-final spot ahead of France. Czech Republic relegate Slovakia from League B, while Norway earn promotion to League B and Macedonia go up to League C.

USA: Oscar Pareja agrees to part company with Dallas after five seasons as coach.

Tuesday November 20

AUSTRALIA: Tim Cahill comes on as an 82nd-minute sub and wins his 108th cap as Australia beat Lebanon 3-0 in Sydney.

UEFA NATIONS LEAGUE: Sweden beat Russia 2-0 to seal promotion to League A. Scotland and Serbia go up from League C, while Kosovo move up from League D. Cyprus are demoted to the fourth tier.

WALES: Chris Gunter plays a record 93rd game for Wales as they lose 1-0 to Albania in a friendly.

Wednesday November 21

CHINA: Players in China will be required to sign new contracts next year that must comply with an as yet undecided salary cap.

DENMARK: International striker Nicklas Bendtner drops his appeal against a 50-day jail term for assaulting a taxi driver and will serve the sentence under "intensive surveillance" with an electronic tag.

ITALY: The company dealing with the sale of Palermo confirm that Maurizio Zamparini has sold 100 per cent of the Serie B club.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: Martin O'Neill resigns as national coach, along with his assistant Roy Keane, after one win in 11 games.

USA: A 2-0 win over Mexico sees the USA retain the CONCACAF Under-20 title. The finalists will be joined by Honduras and Panama at the 2019 Under-19 World Cup. WS

UEFA Nations League

GAVIN HAMILTON

New format hailed a success

Any doubts that UEFA's new Nations League competition might fail to capture a jaded public's imagination were dispelled where it mattered most – on the pitch, where many of the groups went down to the wire.

Attention was held until the final minutes in many key matches, with dramatic comebacks by Switzerland, Holland and England providing excitement until the last moments of the campaign.

The three-team format in Leagues A and B certainly contributed to the drama, but even in Leagues C and D there were many notable storylines, including the emergence of UEFA's newest member, Kosovo.

The promoted teams from all 16 groups will now compete in play-offs, which will add a new – if somewhat confusing – element to the qualifying campaign for Euro 2020 which kicks off in March.

LEAGUE A

▲ **Holland, Switzerland, Portugal, England qualify for next summer's finals**
▼ **Germany, Iceland, Poland, Croatia relegated**

Holland confirmed their revival under Ronald Koeman by winning Group 1, ahead of world champions France and 2014 World Cup winners Germany.

France's 2-0 reverse in Rotterdam ended their 15-game unbeaten run and took the group to the final game. Didier Deschamps' side were missing injured midfielder Paul Pogba and it was his replacement, Steven Nzonzi, who was at fault for Holland's opening goal, when his poor clearance was punished by Georginio Wijnaldum. Memphis Depay added a penalty in injury time.

France were still favourites to finish top going into the final group game when the Dutch travelled to Germany needing at least a point to dislodge the French.

A blistering first-half from Germany's young attackers Leroy Sane, Serge Gnabry and Sandro Werner put Joachim Low's side 2-0 up and in control at the break. But a remarkable recovery from the visitors, with late goals from Quincy Promes and Virgil Van Dijk, secured an unlikely point for Koeman, who has found key roles for new captain Van Dijk, Ajax youngsters Matthijs De Ligt and Frenkie De Jong, the revived Depay, and veteran forward Ryan Babel.

In contrast, Germany's problems continue. Low attributed his team's failure to kill off the game to a lack of experience, saying: "This is a relatively young team. Sometimes, this is the price you have to pay."

Belgium looked set to top Group 2 after they beat Switzerland 2-1 in Brussels with two goals from Michy Batshuayi. That result meant the Swiss would need to beat the Belgians by two clear goals in their final game in Lucerne.

Despite missing Mousa Dembele, Romelu Lukaku, Marouane Fellaini, Jan Vertonghen and Kevin De Bruyne, Belgium went 2-0 up on Swiss soil with two early first-half goals from Thorgan Hazard. A Ricardo Rodriguez penalty handed the hosts a lifeline, then two goals from Haris Seferovic put them 3-2 up at the break.

A Nico Elvedi header from a cross by Xherdan Shaqiri gave them the required two-goal cushion before Seferovic completed his hat-trick.

Iceland, pointless and yet to win under new coach Erik Hamren, were relegated to League B.

Portugal qualified for the final play-offs, which they will host next summer, after holding Italy to a goalless draw in Milan. They did so without Cristiano Ronaldo, who was rested amid his legal distractions, and it remains unclear whether the Juventus forward will return to international action.

Despite missing out on the play-offs, Italy coach Roberto Mancini earned praise for introducing new blood such as Moise Kean, Nicolo Barella and Sandro Tonali. However, a lack of cutting edge cost them dear against Portugal.

Poland, who have yet to win under coach Jerzy Brzeczek, were relegated.

Gareth Southgate's England won a

Hat-trick...Haris Seferovic was Switzerland's hero against Belgium

Late show...Virgil Van Dijk scored Holland's equaliser in Germany

group that could have gone three ways on the final match day.

In the end, Harry Kane bundled in a late winner to secure a 2-1 victory that relegated Croatia and put England ahead of Spain. World Cup runners-up Croatia had taken the lead at Wembley through Andrej Kramaric, but substitutes Jesse Lingard, Dele Alli and Jadon Sancho made the difference.

It was a mixed bag of results for Spain's new coach Luis Enrique: two wins – including a 6-0 thrashing of Croatia – followed by two defeats.

After losing 3-2 at home to England in Seville, Spain went down 3-2 in Croatia in a pulsating game that was settled by an injury-time winner, the second of two unlikely goals from defender Tin Jedvaj, who said: "I've never scored two goals. I scored a goal and an own goal, but never two goals!"

LEAGUE A TABLE

GROUP 1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	4	2	1	1	8	4	7
France	4	2	1	1	4	4	7
Germany (R)	4	0	2	2	3	7	2

GROUP 2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Switzerland	4	3	0	1	14	5	9
Belgium	4	3	0	1	9	6	9
Iceland (R)	4	0	0	4	1	13	0

GROUP 3	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portugal	4	2	2	0	5	3	8
Italy	4	1	2	1	2	2	5
Poland (R)	4	0	2	2	4	6	2

GROUP 4	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
Spain	4	2	0	2	12	7	6
Croatia (R)	4	1	1	2	4	10	4

Through... Portugal

LEAGUE B

▲ **Ukraine, Sweden, Bosnia, Denmark promoted to League A and into the play-offs**

▼ **Slovakia, Turkey, Northern Ireland, Rep of Ireland relegated to League C**

Ukraine, now coached by former star Andriy Shevchenko, were confirmed as group winners after a 1-0 win over Czech Republic in Kharkiv, as Ruslan Malinovskyi's long-range, first-half strike secured a third successive win and their best run for four years.

Defeat left the Czechs and neighbours Slovakia in a battle to avoid relegation. Jan Kozak quit as Slovakia coach after October's 2-1 defeat to Czech Republic in Trnava, a second successive Nations League defeat, with Kozak protesting that a group of seven players had gone out partying after the loss. His replacement, Pavel Hapal, oversaw a sparkling 4-1 win over Ukraine – who were already confirmed as group winners - which included a spectacular backheeled goal by Adam Zre'lak.

However, in the decisive final game against Czech Republic at Prague's Eden Arena, Roma striker Patrik Schick scored the only goal of the game to relegate Slovakia.

Sweden, with a 2-0 win over Russia in their decisive final game, took top spot in Group 2 thanks to their better head-to-head record. Having drawn 0-0 in Moscow in October, the teams met again in Solna, where goals from Victor Lindelof and Marcus Berg gave the Swedes victory.

Three days earlier, Sweden had won a tight encounter in Konya by a single goal – a Andreas Granqvist penalty – to relegate Turkey.

Bosnia's 0-0 draw with Austria in Vienna was enough to give Robert Prosinecki's side promotion to League A.

Austria salvaged some pride with a last-gasp 2-1 victory over Northern Ireland in Belfast, Valentino Lazaro scoring with the last kick of the game. It was a hugely disappointing campaign for Northern Ireland, who were the only

Gone...Martin O'Neill quit the Republic of Ireland

Vital... Czech Republic's Patrik Schick (right)

League B team to finish pointless, and they were relegated.

Denmark's 2-1 victory over Wales in Cardiff gave them promotion from Group 4. Counter-attacking goals from Nicolai Jorgensen and Martin Braithwaite put the Danes in control and although Gareth Bale's well-taken shot prompted a late Welsh rally it was not enough for Ryan Giggs' side.

Republic of Ireland, whose only goal of the campaign came in the 4-1 defeat away to Wales in their opening game, were relegated, prompting the departure of manager Martin O'Neill and assistant Roy Keane after five years in charge.

LEAGUE B TABLE

GROUP 1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ukraine (P)	4	3	0	1	5	5	9
Czech Republic	4	2	0	2	4	4	6
Slovakia (R)	4	1	0	3	5	5	3

GROUP 2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sweden (P)	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
Russia	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
Turkey (R)	4	1	0	3	4	7	3

GROUP 3	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bosnia (P)	4	3	1	0	5	1	10
Austria	4	2	1	1	3	2	7
N Ireland (R)	4	0	0	4	2	7	0

GROUP 4	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark (P)	4	2	2	0	4	1	8
Wales	4	2	0	2	6	5	6
Rep Ireland (R)	4	0	2	2	1	5	2

Happy...Sweden's Martin Olsson

LEAGUE C

▲ **Scotland, Finland, Norway, Serbia promoted to League B and into the play-offs**
▼ **Albania, Estonia, Slovenia, Lithuania relegated to League D**

A James Forrest hat-trick gave Scotland a thrilling 3-2 victory over Israel at Hampden Park to secure top spot in Group 1 and firmly answer the critics of manager Alex McLeish.

Forrest had also scored twice in a 4-0 win in Albania three days earlier.

McLeish, back for his second spell in charge, denied he had been set to quit if the Israel and Albania results had gone against him.

Scotland were missing a host of injured and suspended players, including Kieran Tierney and John McGinn, but McLeish recalled Steven Fletcher and deployed the Sheffield Wednesday striker alongside Forrest and Bournemouth's in-form Ryan Fraser.

Israel, who had installed former Austria international and Jurgen Klinsmann assistant Andi Herzog as coach, enjoyed home wins over Scotland and Albania in October but came up short in Glasgow.

Albania, missing injured and suspended players, including striker Armando Sadiku and winger Odise Roshi, had a disappointing campaign, prompting calls for Italian coach Christian Panucci to resign, but he did regain some credibility with a friendly win over Wales.

Finland clinched promotion to League B despite losing their final two games to Greece and Hungary. New Greece coach Angelos Anastasiadis, who replaced Michael Skibbe after losses to Hungary and Finland, started promisingly with a win over Finland but then lost to bottom-placed Estonia in their final match.

Hungary, under new Italian coach Marco Rossi, finished the group strongly with wins over Estonia and Finland.

Norway clinched promotion from Group 3 with a 2-0 win in Cyprus, with both goals scored by LA Galaxy forward Ola Kamara. Bulgaria could have taken the top spot but were held 1-1 by Slovenia in their final game, thanks to a late goal from Empoli attacker Miha Zajc.

Slovenia, having losing their opening three games, drew with Norway and Bulgaria in their final two matches, but the points were not enough to avoid relegation.

Serbia secured their promotion to League B with a 4-1 win over Lithuania in Belgrade, with all the goals scored in the second half.

Top scorer Aleksandr Mitrovic was one of those on target, but three days earlier he had scored, along with Adem Ljajic, to put the Serbs 2-0 up against Montenegro by half-time - only to then miss a second-half penalty in what ended up as a narrow 2-1 win.

Romania were also unbeaten in the group, while relegated Lithuania were the only League C team to finish the campaign without a point.

Clash...Serbia (in white) get the better of Lithuania

LEAGUE C TABLE

GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Scotland (P)	4	3	0	1	10	4	9
Israel	4	2	0	2	6	5	6
Albania (R)	4	1	0	3	1	8	3

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Finland (P)	6	4	0	2	5	3	12
Hungary	6	3	1	2	9	6	10
Greece	6	3	0	3	4	5	9
Estonia (R)	6	1	1	4	4	8	4

GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Norway (P)	6	4	1	1	7	2	13
Bulgaria	6	3	2	1	7	5	11
Cyprus	6	1	2	3	5	9	5
Slovenia (R)	6	0	3	3	5	8	3

GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Serbia (P)	6	4	2	0	11	4	14
Romania	6	3	3	0	8	3	12
Montenegro	6	2	1	3	7	6	7
Lithuania (R)	6	0	0	6	3	16	0

Treble...James Forrest

Battle...Belarus midfielder Ihar Stasevich (left) vies with Luxembourg's Laurent Jans

LEAGUE D

▲ **Georgia, Belarus, Kosovo, Macedonia promoted to League C, and into the play-offs**

Georgia cruised through Group 1, with coach Vladimir Weiss overseeing five wins and a draw. Teenage number 10 Giorgi Chakvetadze, scorer of the winner against Kazakhstan in their final game, emerged as an exciting new star.

It was a disappointing start as Latvia coach for Mixu Paatelainen, whose side played out a goalless draw with Andorra in their final game.

Luxembourg enjoyed their most successful spell but missed out on promotion after losing 2-0 to Belarus in their penultimate game and then drawing with Moldova in their final match.

Bottom team San Marino were the only team in League D to end the tournament pointless.

Kosovo, four years on from their first international, thrashed Azerbaijan 4-0 to clinch top spot in their group. The victory was notable for a hat-trick from winger Arber Zeneli, one of a number of exciting young second-generation Kosovan-Albanians who are now opting to play for the country.

Kosovo had earlier beaten Malta 5-0 and the competition marked a new low for the Maltese who finished bottom, below Faroe Islands, in a disappointing start for coach Ray Farrugia.

Macedonia finished ahead of Armenia to claim top spot in Group 4, and there was further progress for Gibraltar, who finished above bottom-placed Liechtenstein despite a 4-0 defeat by Macedonia in their final game.

Promoted...Guram Kashia (left) and David Khocholava of Georgia

LEAGUE D TABLE

GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Georgia (P)	6	5	1	0	12	2	16
Kazakhstan	6	1	3	2	8	7	6
Latvia	6	0	4	2	2	6	4
Andorra	6	0	4	2	2	9	4

GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Belarus (P)	6	4	2	0	10	0	14
Luxembourg	6	3	1	2	11	4	10
Moldova	6	2	3	1	4	5	9
San Marino	6	0	0	6	0	16	0

GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kosovo (P)	6	4	2	0	15	2	14
Azerbaijan	6	2	3	1	7	6	9
Faroe Islands	6	1	2	3	5	10	5
Malta	6	0	3	3	5	14	3

GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Macedonia (P)	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
Armenia	6	3	1	2	14	8	10
Gibraltar	6	2	0	4	5	15	6
Liechtenstein	6	1	1	4	7	12	4

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

OCTOBER 2018

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SEASON RANKINGS
Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	6
Wojciech SZCZESNY (Juventus)	5
EDERSON (Manchester City)	4
Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (Barcelona)	4
Thibaut COURTOIS (Real Madrid)	2
Roman BURKI (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Jordi MASIP (Real Valladolid)	1
NETO (Valencia)	1
Oier OLAZABAL (Levante)	1
Rui PATRICIO (Wolverhampton Wanderers)	1

DEFENDERS

Virgil VAN DIJK (Liverpool)	12
Leonardo BONUCCI (Juventus)	10
Joao CANCELO (Juventus)	8
MARQUINHOS (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Thomas MEUNIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	7
Giorgio CHIELLINI (Juventus)	6
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	5
ALEX SANDRO (Juventus)	5
Ashraf HAKIMI (Borussia Dortmund)	5
Marco ALONSO (Chelsea)	4
Manuel AKANJI (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	3
Milan SKRINIAR (Internazionale)	3
DAVID LUIZ (Chelsea)	2
Joe GOMEZ (Liverpool)	2
Lucas HERNANDEZ (Atletico Madrid)	2
Vincent KOMPANY (Manchester City)	2
Aymeric LAPORTE (Manchester City)	2
Kyle WALKER (Manchester City)	2
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	1
Trent ALEXANDER-ARNOLD (Liverpool)	1
Juan BERNAT (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Dani CARVAJAL (Real Madrid)	1
Matthijs DE LIGT (Ajax)	1
Mats HUMMELS (Bayern Munich)	1
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	1
Benjamin MENDY (Manchester City)	1
Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	1
Sergi ROBERTO (Barcelona)	1
Nicolas TAGLIAFICO (Ajax)	1
Thiago SILVA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	15
Marco REUS (Borussia Dortmund)	8
David SILVA (Manchester City)	8
Philippe COUTINHO (Barcelona)	4
JORGINHO (Chelsea)	4
Miralem PJANIC (Juventus)	4
Axel WITSEL (Borussia Dortmund)	4
FERNANDINHO (Manchester City)	3
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	3
Jadon SANCHO (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Bernardo SILVA (Manchester City)	3
ARTHUR (Barcelona)	2
Thomas DELANEY (Borussia Dortmund)	2
ISCO (Real Madrid)	2
Blaise MATUIDI (Juventus)	2
James MILNER (Liverpool)	2
Nicolas PEPE (Lille)	2
Ever BANEGA (Sevilla)	1
Ross BARKLEY (Chelsea)	1
Angel DI MARIA (PSG)	1
Javairo DILROSUN (Hertha Berlin)	1
Ondrej DUDA (Hertha Berlin)	1
Ilkay GUNDOGAN (Mancheser City)	1
Sami KHEDIRA (Juventus)	1
Luka MODRIC (Real Madrid)	1
Jesus NAVAS (Sevilla)	1
Matteo POLITANO (Internazionale)	1
Ivan RAKITIC (Barcelona)	1
SAUL Niguez (Atletico Madrid)	1
Georginio WIJNALDUM (Liverpool)	1
WILLIAN (Chelsea)	1

FORWARDS

Kylian MBAPPE (Paris Saint-Germain)	9
Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	9
Krzysztof PIATEK (Genoa)	9
Andre SILVA (Sevilla)	8
Paco ALCACER (Borussia Dortmund)	7
Luis SUAREZ (Barcelona)	6
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	5
NEYMAR (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	3
Cristiano RONALDO (Juventus)	3
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (Arsenal)	2
Lorenzo INSIGNE (Napoli)	2
Mohammed SALAH (Liverpool)	2
Hakim ZIYECH (Ajax)	2
Gareth BALE (Real Madrid)	1
Roberto FIRMINO (Liverpool)	1
Luka JOVIC (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	1

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Club football

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Semi-finals

1st legs - Oct 2/3; 2nd legs - Oct 23/24

Al Sadd (Qat) v Persepolis (Irn)
0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2)

Kashima Antlers (Jap) v Suwon Bluewings (SKo)
3-2, 3-3 (agg 6-5)

Final

1st leg

Nov 3

Kashima Antlers 2 (Leo Silva 58, Serginho 70)
Persepolis 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 35,022. **Ref:** Ma (Chn)
Kashima Antlers: Kwoun - Nishi, Yamamoto, Shoji, Jung, Misao, Doi (Nagaki 80), Leo Silva, Serginho (Kanamori 90+1), Suzuki, Abe (Anzai 69).
Persepolis: Beiranvand - Mosleh, J Hosseini, Khalilzadeh, Ansari, Nemati, Kamyabinia, Resan, Nourollahi (Alishah 70), Alipour, Mensha. *Sent off: Nemati 90+2.*

2nd leg

Nov10

Persepolis 0
Kashima Antlers 0
Att: 100,000. **Ref:** Al Kaf (Oma)
Kashima Antlers 2-0 on agg
Persepolis: Beiranvand - Khalilzadeh, J Hosseini, Ansari (Alvanzadeh 69), Mosleh, Hemati (Rabiekah 64), Kamyabinia, Nourollahi, Resan, Alipour, Mensha.
Kashima Antlers: Kwoun - Nishi, Jung, Shoji, Yamamoto, Doi (Anzai 68), Misao, Leo Silva, Abe (Kanamori 90+3), Serginho, Suzuki (Nagaki 77).

AFC CUP

Final

Oct 27 - Basra, Iraq

Al Quwa Al Jawiya (Irq) 2 (Ahmad 22, Bayesh 57)
Altyn Asyr (Tkm) 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 24,665. **Ref:** Al Jassim (Qat)
Al Quwa Al Jawiya: Gassid - Saeed, Abdul-Ridha, Natiq, Bahjat, Bayesh, Midani, M Ali (Majid 77), Husni (K Ali 81), Ahmad, Mohsin (Radhi 90+1).
Altyn Asyr: Orazmuhamedov - Annaorazov, Batyrov (Tursunov 77), Saparov, Babajanov (Soyunov 46), Astanov, Geldiyev, Asyrov (Bayov 58), Nurmuradov, Annadurdyyev, Orazsahedov.

AFGHANISTAN

2018 Championship Final

Oct 25: Shaheen Asmayee 0 Toofan Harirod 1 (aet).

BHUTAN

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Transport U (C)	10	6	1	3	26	15	19
Paro United	10	6	0	4	19	12	18
Thimphu City	10	5	2	3	17	10	17
Ugyen Acad	10	5	2	3	18	12	17
Thimphu FC	10	3	0	7	19	20	9
Phuentsholing	10	2	1	7	9	39	7

CHINA

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S'hai SIPG (C)	30	21	5	4	77	33	68
Guangzhou E	30	20	3	7	82	36	63
Shandong	30	17	7	6	57	39	58
Beijing Guoan	30	15	8	7	64	45	53
Jiangsu	30	13	9	8	48	33	48
Hebei	30	10	9	11	46	50	39
S'hai Shenhua	30	10	8	12	44	53	38
Beijing Renhe	30	9	10	11	33	46	37
Tianjin Q'jian	30	9	9	12	41	48	36
Gua'zhou R&F	30	10	6	14	49	61	36
Dalian Yifang	30	10	5	15	37	57	35
Henan	30	10	4	16	30	45	34
Chongqing	30	8	8	14	40	46	32
Tianjin Teda	30	8	8	14	41	54	32
Changchun (R)	30	8	8	14	45	56	32
Guizhou (R)	30	7	3	20	34	66	24

KYRGYZSTAN

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dordoi (C)	28	21	5	2	94	31	68
Alay	28	18	6	4	79	35	60
Abdish-Ata	28	16	7	5	53	29	55
Neftchi	28	14	5	9	47	40	47
Alga	28	13	7	8	51	35	46
Ilbirs	28	5	3	20	34	73	18
Kara-Balta (R)	28	4	1	23	38	91	13
Akademiya (R)	28	4	0	24	30	92	12

TAIWAN

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tatung (C)	21	17	3	1	75	14	54
Taipower	21	13	5	3	51	16	44
Hang Yuen	21	11	5	5	42	22	38
Hasus TSU	21	8	5	8	49	38	29
Tainan City	21	9	2	10	45	48	29
Taicheng	21	8	2	11	43	51	26
Royal Blues	21	5	3	13	25	65	18
NSTC	21	0	1	20	11	87	1

TAJIKISTAN

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Istiklol (C)	21	16	3	2	36	16	51
Khujand	21	14	4	3	42	20	46
Kuktosh	21	9	3	9	31	32	30
Regar-TadAZ	21	8	4	9	27	26	28
Khatlon	21	7	4	10	27	29	25
CSKA Pomir	21	5	9	7	24	33	24
Panjshir	21	4	6	11	16	29	18
Barki Tajik (R)	21	4	1	16	16	34	13

TURKMENISTAN

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Altyn Asyr (C)	28	21	3	4	65	16	66
Ahal	28	18	6	4	55	22	60
Energetik	28	12	6	10	26	27	42
Sagadam	28	12	5	11	25	34	41
Merw	28	6	11	11	26	34	29
Kopetdag	28	8	5	15	27	39	29
Asgabat FK	28	7	6	15	23	41	27
Balkan	28	6	2	20	30	64	20

AFRICA

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Semi-finals

1st legs - Oct 2; 2nd legs - Oct 23

Al Ahly (Egy) v ES Setif (Alg)
2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)

Primeiro Agosto (Ang) v Esperance Tunis (Tun)
1-0, 2-4 (agg 3-4)

Final

1st leg

Nov 2

Al Ahly 3 (Soliman pen 34, pen 77, El Sulaya 58)
Esperance Tunis 1 (Belaili pen 64)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 60,000. **Ref:** Abid Charef (Alg)
Al Ahly: El Shenawy - Fathy (Hany 22), Samir, Coulibaly, Ashraf, Hamoudi (Gaber 67), Ashour, El Sulaya, Mohareb, Soliman, Azaro.
Esperance Tunis: Ben Cherifia - Derbali, Dhaouadi, Chemmam, Rabii, Coulibaly, Kom, Chaalali, Badri, Khenissi (Mejri 79), Belaili.

2nd leg

Nov 9

Esperance Tunis 3 (Bguir 45+1, 54, Badri 86)
Al Ahly 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 60,000. **Ref:** Tessema (Eth)
Esperance Tunis 4-3 on agg
Esperance Tunis: Ben Cherifia - Derbali, Yacoubi, Chemmam, Ben Mohamed, Coulibaly, Chaalali, Badri, Bguir (Rabii 62), Belaili (Meskini 80), Khenissi (Mejri 69).
Al Ahly: El Shenawy - Hany (Walid 62), Samir, Coulibaly, Ashraf, Ashour, El Sulaya (Hamoudi 75), Soliman, Gaber (S Mohsen 62), Mohareb, M Mohsen.

CONFEDERATION CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs - Oct 3; 2nd legs - Oct 24

Al Masry (Egy) v AS Vita (DRC)
0-0, 0-4 (agg 0-4)

Enyimba (Nga) v Raja Casablanca (Mor)
0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3)

COMOROS

2018 – NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fomboni[1,2]	4	2	2	0	6	3	5
Volcan[1,2]	4	2	2	0	5	3	5
Etoile d'Or	4	0	0	4	2	7	0

[1]As the top 2 finished level on points and head-to-head results (goal difference disregarded), a play-off to decide the championship was scheduled
[2]3pts deducted for alleged witchcraft practices during matches

Championship play-off

Oct 17: Fomboni 0 Volcan 3 (awarded, Fomboni did not show up).

CONGO

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AS Otoho (C)	30	24	3	3	66	16	75
La Mancha	30	23	2	5	48	19	71
Diables Noirs	30	21	5	4	68	19	68
Leopards	30	18	5	7	46	28	59
CARA	30	14	6	10	38	25	48
Cheminots	30	15	3	12	36	29	48
JS Talangai	30	12	7	11	32	35	43
Etoile Congo[1]	30	12	6	12	36	37	41
Inter Club	30	9	7	14	28	38	34
Tongo Jambon	30	9	4	17	30	55	31
VC Mokanda	30	8	6	16	17	34	30
Patronage	30	9	3	18	19	39	30
Nico-Nicoye	30	9	1	20	21	48	28
Kondzo	30	7	6	17	30	44	27
Poto-Poto (R)	30	6	9	15	26	53	27
St-Michel (R)	30	3	9	18	20	42	18

[1] 1pt deducted because of aggression towards match officials

LIBERIA

2018 Championship Final

Oct 17: Barrack Young Controllers 2 LPRC Oilers 2 (aet, Barrack Young Controllers 4-2 on pens).

MOZAMBIQUE

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Uniao Songo (C)	30	17	7	6	38	26	58
F'viario Ma'to	30	17	3	10	30	23	54
LD Maputo	30	15	6	9	37	25	51
F'viario Nam'a	30	13	8	9	46	34	47
Maxaquene	30	11	11	8	34	28	44
Chibuto	30	11	10	9	39	24	43
Textafrica	30	11	9	10	26	34	42
Costa do Sol	30	9	13	8	24	17	40
F'viario Beira	30	10	9	11	37	28	39
ENH Vil'kulo	30	10	8	12	21	26	38
Dvo Nacala	30	10	8	12	24	23	38
Incomati	30	8	11	11	19	21	35
F'viario Nac'a	30	8	11	11	18	26	35
UP Manica (R)	30	8	10	12	24	34	34
1 de Maio (R)	30	8	8	14	24	36	32
Sporting (R)	30	4	8	18	19	55	20

SUDAN

2018 – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal Om[1] (C)	14	12	1	1	30	4	31
Al Merreikh O	14	10	1	3	24	9	31
Al Hilal Ob	14	6	3	5	16	13	21
Al Ahli Sh'di	14	6	2	6	18	17	20
Merreikh El F	14	5	2	7	12	22	17
Khartoum	14	4	2	8	14	22	14
Hay Al Arab	14	3	2	9	8	20	11
Al Ahli Merowe	14	2	3	9	9	24	9

[1]6pts deducted

ZAMBIA

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Zesco Utd (C)	38	24	8	6	53	22	80
Nkana	38	22	10	6	66	27	76
Grn Buffaloes	38	21	11	6	39	19	74
Green Eagles	38	20	11	7	52	29	71
Zanaco	38	21	4	13	53	40	67
Power Dy'mos	38	17	11	10	48	33	62
Kabwe Wa'rs	38	15	13	10	31	27	58
Buildcon	38	16	8	14	44	37	56
Red Arrows	38	13	14	11	34	31	53
Nkwazi	38	12	15	11	31	29	51
L'ka Dynamos	38	15	6	17	47	48	51
Forest Rangers	38	14	9	15	38	39	51
Kitwe United	38	11	13	14	36	37	46
Napsa Stars	38	10	15	13	29	30	45
N Leopards	38	12	7	19	18	32	43
L Radiants	38	9	14	15	24	40	41
N Assembly (R)	38	9	12	17	38	55	39
Kabwe YSA (R)	38	5	12	21	28	59	27
Nchanga R's (R)	38	6	8	24	16	47	26
New Monze (R)	38	3	9	26	16	60	18

EUROPE

ESTONIA

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kalju (C)	36	25	11	0	114	32	86
FCI	36	26	6	4	109	26	84
Flora	36	25	8	3	116	32	83
Trans	36	18	7	11	76	57	61
Paide	36	14	9	13	64	74	51
Tammeka	36	14	7	15	56	58	49
Tulevik	36	8	5	23	37	100	29
Tallinna Kalev	36	7	7	22	54	68	28
Kuressaare[1]	36	6	3	27	34	115	21
Vaprus (R)	36	2	7	27	25	123	13

[1]Enter rel/prom play-off

FAROE ISLANDS

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
HB (C)	27	24	1	2	58	18	73
NSI	27	17	4	6	64	25	55
B36	27	16	5	6	58	33	53
KI	27	16	3	8	48	25	51
Vikingur	27	11	6	10	39	37	39
Skala	27	8	5	14	31	42	29
TB/FCS/Royn	27	8	4	15	27	42	28
EB/Streymur	27	4	9	14	30	53	21
AB	27	5	3	19	16	55	18
07 Vestur (R)	27	5	2	20	30	71	17

FINLAND

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
HJK (C)	33	24	6	3	61	19	78
RoPS	33	18	8	7	42	25	62
KuPS	33	17	7	9	56	37	58
Honka	33	15	13	5	51	33	58
Ilves	33	14	7	12	45	41	49
VPS	33	10	11	12	37	43	41
Inter	33	10	10	13	37	44	40
Lahti	33	9	13	11	30	38	40
SJK	33	8	8	17	28	37	32
Mariehamn	33	8	7	18	37	59	31
TPS (R)[1]	33	7	8	18	37	55	29
PS Kemi (R)	33	6	6	21	29	59	24

[1]Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off

KAZAKHSTAN

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Astana (C)	33	24	5	4	66	22	77
Kairat	33	19	5	9	60	33	62
Tobol	33	15	8	10	36	30	53
Ordabasy	33	13	7	13	38	44	46
Kaysar	33	11	12	10	35	31	45
Zhetysu	33	11	10	12	36	40	43
Aktobe[1]	33	13	9	11	51	47	42
Shakhter	33	8	12	13	29	36	36
Atyrau	33	9	9	15	34	47	36
Irtysh[2]	33	10	5	18	28	45	35
Kyzyl-Zhar (R)	33	10	5	18	27	48	35
Akzhayik (R)	33	7	9	17	31	48	30

[1]6pts deducted for not paying former player
[2]Enter rel/prom play-off

LATVIA

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Riga FC (C)	28	20	4	4	45	16	64
Ventspils	28	18	6	4	54	22	60
RFS	28	18	1	9	57	23	55
FK Liepaja	28	15	6	7	46	25	51
Spartaks	28	12	6	10	48	37	42
Jelgava	28	6	3	19	19	48	21
Metta/LU[1]	28	5	4	19	24	52	19
Valmiera (R)	28	2	2	24	22	92	8

[1]Stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off

LITHUANIA

The top 6 in the 8-team, 28-round regular season qualified for the championship play-offs; bottom team Jonava were relegated automatically, 7th-placed Palanga stay in the top division after winning their rel/prom play-off

2018 – CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFFS – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Suduva (C)	33	24	5	4	72	20	77
Zalgiris	33	23	6	4	70	23	75
Trakai	33	14	9	10	46	29	51
Stumbras	33	15	6	12	45	35	51
Kauno	33	11	6	16	29	41	39
Atlantas	33	6	6	21	28	75	24

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dundalk (C)	36	27	6	3	85	20	87
Cork	36	24	5	7	71	27	77
Shamrock	36	18	8	10	57	27	62
Waterford	36	18	5	13	52	44	59
St Patrick's	36	15	5	16	51	47	50
Bohemians	36	13	9	14	52	45	48
Sligo	36	12	6	18	38	50	42
Derry	36	13	3	20	47	70	42
Limerick (R)[1]	36	7	6	23	25	75	27
Bray (R)	36	5	3	28	23	96	18

[1]Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off

SWEDEN

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AIK (C)	30	19	10	1	50	16	67
Norrkoping	30	19	8	3	51	27	65
Malmo	30	17	7	6	57	29	58
Hammarby	30	17	7	6	56	35	58
Hacken	30	16	5	9	58	27	53
Ostersund	30	15	4	11	51	39	49
Djurgarden	30	13	9	8	40	31	48
Sundsvall	30	12	8	10	47	35	44
Orebro	30	9	8	13	34	40	35
Kalmar	30	9	7	14	27	35	34
IFK Goth'burg	30	9	4	17	38	53	31
Elfsborg	30	7	9	14	29	41	30
Sirius	30	8	6	16	37	61	30
Brom'karna[1]	30	8	2	20	25	64	26
Dalkurd (R)	30	6	6	18	30	57	24
Trelleborg (R)	30	3	6	21	24	64	15

[1]Enter rel/prom play-off

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Semi-finals

1st legs

Oct 23
River Plate (Arg) 0
Gremio (Bra) 1 (Michel 62)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Carrillo (Per)

Oct 24
Boca Juniors (Arg) 2 (Benedetto 84, 88)
Palmeiras (Bra) 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Tobar (Chl)

2nd legs

Oct 30
Gremio 1 (Leo Gomes 36)
River Plate 2 (Borre 82, Martinez pen 90+5)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Cunha (Uru)
Sent off: Bressan (Gremio) 88
Agg 2-2; River Plate on away goals

Oct 31
Palmeiras 2 (Luan 53, Gomez pen 61)
Boca Juniors 2 (Abila 18, Benedetto 70)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Roldan (Col)
Boca Juniors 4-2 on agg

SUDAMERICANA CUP

Quarter-finals

1st legs - Oct 23-25; 2nd legs - Oct 30-Nov1
Bahia (Bra) v Atletico Paranaense (Bra)
0-1, 1-0 (agg 1-1, At Paranaense 4-1 on pens)
Fluminense (Bra) v Nacional (Uru)
1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1)
Junior (Col) v Defensa y Justicia (Arg)
2-0, 1-3 (agg 3-3, Junior on away goals)
Santa Fe (Col) v Deportivo Cali (Col)
1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2)

URUGUAY

2018 – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Penarol (Q)	15	11	3	1	25	10	36
Nacional	15	9	3	3	19	14	30
Wanderers	15	8	4	3	26	20	28
Racing	15	7	4	4	17	13	25
Liverpool	15	6	5	4	22	17	23
Defensor	15	6	4	5	23	19	22
Progreso	15	6	4	5	21	19	22
Rampla Jnrs	15	5	6	4	16	16	21
Cerro	15	5	6	4	22	23	21
Danubio	15	4	8	3	13	15	20
Torque (R)[1]	15	4	6	5	16	18	18
Fenix	15	5	3	7	16	19	18
River Plate	15	4	3	8	20	33	15
Boston River	15	4	2	9	14	22	14
Atenas (R)[1]	15	2	7	6	12	24	13
T Sisley[2] (R)[1]	15	0	0	15	0	0	0

As clausura winners, Penarol qualified for the overall 2018 championship semi-final, against apertura winners Nacional
[1]The 3 teams with the lowest points-per-game average over the 2 most recent seasons were relegated
[2]Excluded before the tournament began for failing to pay debts; all games awarded as wins to their scheduled opponents but with a 0-0 scoreline

Overall 2018 championship semi-final
Nov 11: Nacional 1 Penarol 2 (aet).
As Penarol also topped the 2018 aggregate table, they won the overall 2018 championship (Final not required)

CONCACAF

CONCACAF LEAGUE

Final

1st leg

Oct 25
Herediano (CR) 2 (Marin 23, Cruz 62)
Motagua (Hnd) 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Ortiz (Mex)

2nd leg

Nov1
Motagua 2 (Castillo 45+1, 58)
Herediano 1 (Marin 85)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Escobar (Gtm)
Herediano 3-2 on agg

● *Herediano qualify for the 2019 CONCACAF Champions League*

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

2018 Championship Final
Oct 27: Cibao 1 Atletico San Francisco 0.

OCEANIA

NEW CALEDONIA

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
Magenta (C)	22	17	4	1	63	27	77
Hienghene[3]	22	15	1	6	56	29	64
Mont-Dore	22	12	5	5	31	24	63
Ne Drehu	22	11	6	5	45	28	61
Tiga Sport[4]	22	14	1	7	52	29	59
Lossi[4]	22	10	7	5	48	30	53
Trio Kedeigne[4]	22	7	3	12	33	44	40
Wetr[4]	22	7	2	13	32	34	39
Horizon P'o[2,6]	22	6	6	10	40	32	37
Thio Sport[4] (R)	22	5	4	13	23	50	35
Poindimie[6] (R)	22	5	3	14	44	71	31
AGJP[5] (R)	22	1	2	19	24	93	20

[1]4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat
[2]Enter rel/prom play-off
[3]4pts deducted [4]6pts deducted
[5]7pts deducted [6]9pts deducted

Int'ls

EAFF CHAMPIONSHIP

(East Asian Football Federation)

2nd round

Played in Taipei, Taiwan

Nov11
North Korea 4 (Rim Kwang-hyok 8, 54, Kim Yu-song pen 30, Jong Il-gwan 64)
Mongolia 1 (Naranbold 74)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 125. **Ref:** Tojo (Jap)

Nov11
Taiwan 1 (Chen Ting-yang 81)
Hong Kong 2 (McKee 65, Chung Wai Keung 84)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 1,793. **Ref:** Chae (SKo)

Nov13
Hong Kong 0
North Korea 0
Att: 228. **Ref:** Wicaksana (Ins)

Nov13
Taiwan 2 (Chu En-le 8, 10)
Mongolia 1 (Tsedenbal 62)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 1,157. **Ref:** Ali (Mly)

Nov16
Mongolia 1 (Artag 50)
Hong Kong 5 (Sandro 24, 57, McKee 36, Baise 83, Akande 87)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 263. **Ref:** Chae (SKo)

Nov16
Taiwan 0
North Korea 2 (Jong Il-gwan 47, Jang Kuk-chol 74)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,016. **Ref:** Tojo (Jap)

EAFF CHAMPIONSHIP – 2ND ROUND – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hong Kong (Q)	3	2	1	0	7	2	7
North Korea	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
Taiwan	3	1	0	2	3	5	3
Mongolia	3	0	0	3	3	11	0

Hong Kong qualify for the final round – to be played in 2019 – which China, Japan & hosts South Korea enter directly

FRIENDLIES

Saturday, November 3
Nov 3 - Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia 3 (Zaquan 15, Safawi 80, Sumareh 90+2)
Maldives 0
HT: 1-0

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions
(R) = relegated
(Q) = qualified for next stage

December 2018 Vol 59 No 4

EDITOR Gavin Hamilton
ASSISTANT EDITOR Nich Hills
DESIGN DIRECTOR Kevin Eason
DESIGN EDITOR Jamie Latchford
DEPUTY DESIGN EDITOR Daniel Franklin
PICTURE EDITOR Duncan Bond

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Peter Neish

EDITORIAL
Pinehurst 2, Pinehurst Road, Farnborough Business Park, Farnborough, Hants GU14 7BF
Email: world_soccer@ti-media.com
General enquiries: +44 (0) 1252 555213

ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP
Matthew Johnston
Tel: +44 (0) 1252 555367
Email: matthew.johnston@ti-media.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER Nigel Davies
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR Gareth Beesley
GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR Andrea Davies

International licensing enquiries
+44 (0) 20 314 85490
Email: bianca.hamilton-foster@ti-media.com

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WORLD SOCCER SUBSCRIPTIONS
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FRANCE: LIGUE 1 2018-19

AMIENS

GOALKEEPERS

30	Gauthier **BANAZIAK**	(21) 25.05.97
16	Matthieu **DREYER**	(29) 20.03.89
40	Antonin **GAUDUCHEAU**	(19) 23.02.99
1	Regis **GURTNER**	(32) 08.12.86

DEFENDERS

3	Khaled **ADENON** (Ben)	(33) 28.07.85
24	Mathieu **BODMER**	(36) 22.11.82
12	Bakaye **DIBASSY** (Mli)	(29) 11.08.89
19	Oualid **EL HAJJAM**	(27) 19.02.91
35	Valentin **GENDREY**	(18) 21.06.00
2	Prince-Desir **GOUANO**	(25) 24.12.93
4	Emil **KRAFTH** (Swe)	(24) 02.08.94
25	Jordan **LEFORT**	(25) 09.08.93
37	Sanasi **SY**	(19) 04.04.99

MIDFIELDERS

17	Alexis **BLIN**	(22) 16.09.96
8	Paulo Henrique **GANSO** (Bra)	(29) 12.10.89
5	Eddy **GNAHORE**	(25) 14.11.93
21	Rafal **KURZAWA** (Pol)	(25) 29.01.93
6	Thomas **MONCONDUIT**	(27) 10.02.91
20	Cheick **TIMITE** (IvC)	(21) 20.11.97
14	Gaoussou **TRAORE**	(18) 04.12.99
34	Bongani **ZUNGU** (SAf)	(26) 09.10.92

FORWARDS

13	Quentin **CORNETTE**	(24) 17.01.94
7	Saman **GHODDOS** (Irn)	(25) 06.09.93
32	Martin **GNEBA**	(19) 18.04.99
29	Seybou **KOITA** (Ngr)	(24) 15.04.94
15	Moussa **KONATE** (Sen)	(25) 03.04.93
10	Stiven **MENDOZA** (Col)	(26) 27.06.92
36	Jean-Claude **NGANDO** (Cam)	(19) 20.11.99
11	Juan Ferney **OTERO** (Col)	(23) 26.05.95
38	Reda **RABEI**	(24) 12.07.94

COACH

	Christophe **PELISSIER**	(53) 05.10.65

ANGERS

GOALKEEPERS

1	Zacharie **BOUCHER**	(26) 07.03.92
16	Ludovic **BUTELLE**	(35) 03.04.83
40	Anthony **MANDREA**	(22) 25.12.96

DEFENDERS

2	Rayan **AIT-NOURI**	(17) 06.06.01
3	Yoann **ANDREU**	(29) 03.05.89
25	Abdoulaye **BAMBA** (IvC)	(28) 25.04.90
26	Saliou **CISS** (Sen)	(29) 15.09.89
23	Ibrahim **CISSE**	(22) 02.05.96
29	Vincent **MANCEAU**	(29) 10.07.89
4	Mateo **PAVLOVIC** (Cro)	(28) 09.06.90
24	Romain **THOMAS**	(30) 12.06.88
8	Ismael **TRAORE** (IvC)	(32) 18.08.86

MIDFIELDERS

15	Pierrick **CAPELLE**	(31) 15.04.87
17	Cheikh **N'DOYE** (Sen)	(32) 29.03.86
10	Angelo **FULGINI**	(22) 20.08.96
14	Anthony **GOMEZ-MANCINI**	(17) 06.04.01
5	Thomas **MANGANI**	(31) 29.04.87
7	Harrison **MANZALA** (DRC)	(24) 06.03.94
6	Vincent **PAJOT**	(28) 19.08.90
21	Loic **PUYO**	(30) 19.12.88
22	Jeff **REINE-ADELAIDE**	(20) 17.01.98
18	Baptiste **SANTAMARIA**	(23) 09.03.95
20	Flavien **TAIT**	(25) 02.02.93

FORWARDS

19	Stephane **BAHOKEN** (Cam)	(26) 28.05.92
13	Dorian **BERTRAND**	(25) 21.05.93
12	Ferebory **DORE** (Con)	(29) 21.01.89
28	Farid **EL MELALI** (Alg)	(21) 05.05.97
11	Wilfried **KANGA**	(20) 21.02.98
9	Cristian **LOPEZ** (Spa)	(29) 27.04.89
27	Thomas **TOURE** (IvC)	(25) 27.12.93

COACH

	Stephane **MOULIN**	(51) 04.08.67

BORDEAUX

GOALKEEPERS

1	Benoit **COSTIL**	(31) 03.07.87
40	Over **MANDANDA**	(20) 26.10.98
16	Gaetan **POUSSIN**	(19) 13.01.99
30	Jerome **PRIOR**	(23) 08.08.95

DEFENDERS

2	Milan **GAJIC** (Ser)	(22) 28.01.96
14	Vukasin **JOVANOVIC** (Ser)	(22) 17.05.96
4	Jules **KOUNDE**	(19) 12.11.98
6	Igor **LEWCZUK** (Pol)	(33) 30.05.85
5	**OTAVIO** (Bra)	(24) 04.05.94
25	**PABLO** (Bra)	(27) 21.06.91
3	Sergi **PALENCIA** (Spa)	(22) 23.03.96
21	Theo **PELLENARD**	(24) 04.03.94
29	Maxime **POUNDJE**	(26) 16.08.92
20	Youssouf **SABALY**	(25) 05.03.93

MIDFIELDERS

26	Toma **BASIC** (Cro)	(21) 25.11.96
35	Yassine **BENRAHOU**	(19) 24.01.99
19	Lukas **LERAGER** (Den)	(25) 12.07.93
18	Jaroslav **PLASIL** (CzR)	(36) 05.01.82
13	Younousse **SANKHARE** (Sen)	(29) 10.09.89
17	Aurelien **TCHOUAMENI**	(18) 27.01.00
23	Valentin **VADA** (Arg)	(22) 06.03.96
28	Zaydou **YOUSSOUF**	(19) 11.07.99

FORWARDS

7	Jimmy **BRIAND**	(33) 02.08.85
9	Andreas **CORNELIUS** (Den)	(25) 16.03.93
12	Nicolas **DE PREVILLE**	(27) 08.01.91
10	Samuel **KALU** (Nga)	(21) 26.08.97
11	Francois **KAMANO** (Gui)	(22) 01.05.96
8	Yann **KARAMOH**	(20) 08.07.98
15	Alexandre **MENDY**	(24) 20.03.94

COACH

	RICARDO GOMES (Bra)	(53) 13.12.64

CAEN

GOALKEEPERS

16	Thomas **CALLENS**	(20) 06.09.98
40	Paul **REULET**	(24) 14.01.94
30	Brice **SAMBA** (Con)	(24) 25.04.94
1	Erwin **ZELAZNY**	(27) 22.09.91

DEFENDERS

32	Chaker **ALHADHUR** (Com)	(26) 04.12.91
3	Yoel **ARMOUGOM**	(20) 05.06.98
2	Paul **BAYSSE**	(30) 18.05.88
23	Mouhamadou **DABO**	(32) 28.11.86
24	Alexander **DJIKU**	(24) 09.08.94
29	Romain **GENEVOIS** (Hai)	(31) 28.10.87
14	Jonathan **GRADIT**	(26) 24.11.92
21	Frederic **GUILBERT**	(24) 24.12.94
15	Emmanuel **IMOROU** (Ben)	(30) 16.09.88
20	Issa **MAREGA**	(20) 20.04.98
22	Adama **MBENGUE** (Sen)	(25) 01.12.93

MIDFIELDERS

17	Jessy **DEMINGUET**	(20) 07.01.98
4	Ismael **DIOMANDE** (IvC)	(26) 28.08.92
10	Faycal **FAJR** (Mor)	(30) 01.08.88
7	Saîf-Eddine **KHAOUI** (Tun)	(23) 27.04.95
34	Jeff **LOUIS** (Hai)	(26) 08.08.92
6	Prince **ONIANGUE** (Con)	(30) 04.11.88
8	Stef **PEETERS** (Blg)	(26) 09.02.92
9	Jan **REPAS** (Sln)	(21) 19.03.97
5	Baissama **SANKOH** (Gui)	(26) 20.03.92

FORWARDS

18	Yacine **BAMMOU** (Mor)	(27) 11.09.91
12	Claudio **BEAUVUE**	(30) 16.04.88
27	Enzo **CRIVELLI**	(23) 06.02.95
11	Casimir **NINGA** (Chd)	(25) 17.05.93
19	Malik **TCHOKOUNTE**	(30) 01.09.88

COACH

	Fabien **MERCADAL**	(46) 29.02.72

DIJON

GOALKEEPERS

16	Bobby **ALLAIN**	(27) 28.11.91
30	Levi **NTUMBA**	(17) 12.01.01
1	Runar Alex **RUNARSSON** (Ice)	(23) 18.02.95

DEFENDERS

4	Nayef **AGUERD** (Mor)	(22) 30.03.96
2	Mickael **ALPHONSE**	(29) 12.07.89
3	Arnold **BOUKA MOUTOU** (Con)	(30) 28.11.88
26	Fouad **CHAFIK** (Mor)	(32) 16.10.86
6	Laurent **CIMAN** (Blg)	(33) 05.08.85
25	Senou **COULIBALY**	(24) 04.09.94
5	Oussama **HADDADI** (Tun)	(26) 28.01.92
24	Wesley **LAUTOA** (NwC)	(31) 25.08.87
19	Valentin **ROSIER**	(22) 19.08.96
18	Cedric **YAMBERE** (CAR)	(28) 06.11.90

MIDFIELDERS

8	Mehdi **ABEID** (Alg)	(26) 06.08.92
20	Romain **AMALFITANO**	(29) 27.08.89
15	Florent **BALMONT**	(38) 02.02.80
28	Yoann **GOURCUFF**	(32) 11.07.86
23	Jules **KEITA** (Gui)	(20) 20.07.98
12	Enzo **LOIODICE**	(18) 27.11.00
14	Jordan **MARIE**	(27) 29.09.91
7	Frederic **SAMMARITANO**	(32) 23.03.86
10	Naim **SLITI** (Tun)	(26) 27.07.92

FORWARDS

29	Benjamin **JEANNOT**	(26) 22.01.92
22	**KWON** Chang-hoon (SKo)	(24) 30.06.94
9	Wesley **SAID**	(23) 19.04.95
11	Julio **TAVARES** (CV)	(30) 19.11.88

COACH

	Olivier **DALL'OGLIO**	(54) 16.05.64

GUINGAMP

GOALKEEPERS

16	Marc-Aurele **CAILLARD**	(24) 12.05.94
1	Karl-Johan **JOHNSSON** (Swe)	(28) 28.01.90
30	Denis **PETRIC** (Sln)	(30) 24.05.88

DEFENDERS

20	Felix **EBOA EBOA** (Cam)	(21) 19.04.97
2	Jordan **IKOKO** (DRC)	(24) 03.02.94
29	Christophe **KERBRAT**	(32) 02.08.86
4	Djegui **KOITA**	(18) 05.12.99
5	Pedro **REBOCHO** (Por)	(23) 23.01.95
15	Jeremy **SORBON**	(35) 05.08.83
27	Franck **TABANOU**	(29) 30.01.89
25	Cheick **TRAORE**	(23) 31.03.95

MIDFIELDERS

10	Nicolas **BENEZET**	(27) 24.02.91
7	Ludovic **BLAS**	(20) 31.12.97
24	Marcus **COCO**	(22) 24.06.96
8	Lucas **DEAUX**	(30) 26.12.88
22	Etienne **DIDOT**	(35) 24.07.83
18	Guessouma **FOFANA**	(25) 17.12.92
6	Lebogang **PHIRI** (SAf)	(24) 09.11.94

FORWARDS

14	Nathael **JULAN**	(22) 16.07.96
12	Yeni **NGBAKOTO** (DRC)	(26) 23.01.92
23	Ronny **RODELIN**	(29) 18.11.89
26	Nolan **ROUX**	(30) 01.03.88
11	Marcus **THURAM**	(21) 06.08.97

COACH

	Jocelyn **GOURVENNEC**	(46) 22.03.72

LILLE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Adam **JAKUBECH** (Slk)	(21) 02.01.97
30	Herve **KOFFI** (BuF)	(22) 16.10.96
16	Mike **MAIGNAN**	(23) 03.07.95

DEFENDERS

17	Zeki **CELIK** (Tur)	(21) 17.02.97
22	Kouadio-Yves **DABILA** (IvC)	(21) 01.01.97
6	Jose **FONTE** (Por)	(34) 22.12.83
4	**GABRIEL** (Bra)	(20) 19.12.97
15	Edgar **IE** (Por)	(24) 01.05.94
3	Youssouf **KONE** (Mal)	(23) 05.07.95
26	Jeremy **PIED**	(29) 23.02.89
5	Adama **SOUMAORO**	(26) 18.06.92

MIDFIELDERS

25	Fode **BALLO-TOURE**	(21) 03.01.97
12	Jonathan **IKONE**	(20) 02.05.98
20	Thiago **MAIA** (Bra)	(21) 23.03.97
23	Thiago **MENDES** (Bra)	(26) 15.03.92
24	Boubakary **SOUMARE**	(19) 27.02.99
34	Benjamin **VERITE**	(19) 21.04.99
8	**XEKA** (Por)	(24) 10.11.94
21	Arton **ZEKAJ** (Ser)	(18) 16.04.00

FORWARDS

11	Luiz **ARAUJO** (Bra)	(22) 02.06.96
14	Jonathan **BAMBA**	(22) 26.03.96
10	Rui **FONTE** (Por)	(26) 23.04.90
7	Rafael **LEAO** (Por)	(19) 10.06.99
19	Nicolas **PEPE** (IvC)	(23) 29.05.95
9	Loic **REMY**	(31) 02.01.87

COACH

	Christophe **GALTIER**	(52) 28.08.66

LYON

GOALKEEPERS

30	Mathieu **GORGELIN**	(28) 05.08.90
1	Anthony **LOPES** (Por)	(28) 01.10.90
16	Anthony **RACIOPPI** (Swi)	(19) 31.12.98

DEFENDERS

5	Jason **DENAYER** (Blg)	(23) 28.06.95
14	Leo **DUBOIS**	(24) 14.09.94
20	Fernando **MARCAL** (Bra)	(29) 19.02.89
6	**MARCELO** (Bra)	(31) 20.05.87
22	Ferland **MENDY**	(23) 08.06.95
15	Jeremy **MOREL** (Mad)	(34) 02.04.84
4	**RAFAEL** (Bra)	(28) 09.07.90
26	Oumar **SOLET**	(18) 07.02.00
23	Kenny **TETE** (Hol)	(23) 09.10.95
2	Mapou **YANGA-MBIWA**	(29) 15.05.89

MIDFIELDERS

8	Houssem **AOUAR**	(20) 30.06.98
25	Maxence **CAQUERET**	(18) 15.02.00
24	Pape **DIOP** (Spa)	(21) 08.08.97
12	Jordan **FERRI**	(26) 12.03.92
28	Tanguy **NDOMBELE**	(22) 28.12.96
7	Martin **TERRIER**	(21) 04.03.97
29	Lucas **TOUSART**	(21) 29.04.97

FORWARDS

27	Maxwel **CORNET** (IvC)	(22) 27.09.96
9	Moussa **DEMBELE**	(22) 12.07.96
11	Memphis **DEPAY** (Hol)	(24) 13.02.94
18	Nabil **FEKIR**	(25) 18.07.93
19	Amine **GOUIRI**	(18) 16.02.00
17	Lenny **PINTOR**	(18) 05.08.00
10	Bertrand **TRAORE** (BuF)	(23) 06.09.95

COACH

	Bruno **GENESIO**	(52) 01.09.66

MARSEILLE

GOALKEEPERS

1	Romain **CAGNON**	(21) 12.05.97
40	Florian **ESCALES**	(22) 03.02.96
30	Steve **MANDANDA**	(33) 28.03.85
16	Yohann **PELE**	(36) 04.11.82

DEFENDERS

13	Aymen **ABDENNOUR** (Tun)	(29) 06.08.89
18	Jordan **AMAVI**	(24) 09.03.94
15	Duje **CALETA-CAR** (Cro)	(22) 17.09.96
25	Tomas **HUBOCAN** (Slk)	(33) 17.09.85
4	Boubacar **KAMARA**	(19) 23.11.99
32	Lucas **PERRIN**	(20) 19.11.98
23	Adil **RAMI**	(33) 27.12.85
6	**ROLANDO** (Por)	(33) 31.08.85
20	Christopher **ROCCHIA**	(20) 01.02.98
2	Hiroki **SAKAI** (Jap)	(28) 12.04.90

MIDFIELDERS

31	Florian **CHABROLLE**	(20) 07.04.98
27	Maxime **LOPEZ**	(21) 04.12.97
19	**LUIZ GUSTAVO** (Bra)	(31) 23.07.87
5	Lucas **OCAMPOS** (Arg)	(24) 11.07.94
10	Dimitri **PAYET**	(31) 29.03.87
8	Morgan **SANSON**	(24) 18.08.94
17	Bouna **SARR** (Gui)	(26) 31.01.92
22	Gregory **SERTIC**	(29) 05.08.89
12	Kevin **STROOTMAN** (Hol)	(28) 13.02.90

FORWARDS

28	Valere **GERMAIN**	(28) 17.04.90
11	Kostas **MITROGLOU** (Gre)	(30) 12.03.88
14	Clinton **N'JIE** (Cam)	(25) 15.08.93
7	Nemanja **RADONJIC** (Ser)	(22) 15.02.96
26	Florian **THAUVIN**	(25) 26.01.93

COACH

	Rudi **GARCIA**	(54) 20.02.64

MONACO

GOALKEEPERS

40	Loic **BADIASHIKE**	(20) 05.02.98
16	Diego **BENAGLIO** (Swi)	(35) 08.09.83
1	Danijel **SUBASIC** (Cro)	(34) 27.10.84
30	Seydou **SY** (Sen)	(23) 12.12.95

DEFENDERS

32	Benoît **BADIASHILE**	(17) 26.03.01
3	Antonio **BARRECA** (Ita)	(23) 18.03.95
31	Romain **FAIVRE**	(20) 14.07.98
25	Kamil **GLIK** (Pol)	(30) 03.02.88
39	Benjamin **HENRICHS** (Ger)	(21) 23.02.97
5	**JEMERSON** (Bra)	(26) 24.08.92
18	Ronael **PIERRE-GABRIEL**	(20) 13.06.98
24	Andrea **RAGGI** (Ita)	(34) 24.06.84
21	Julien **SERRANO**	(20) 13.02.98
19	Djibril **SIDIBE**	(26) 29.07.92
38	Almamy **TOURE** (Mli)	(22) 28.04.96

MIDFIELDERS

4	Jean-Eudes **AHOLOU** (IvC)	(24) 20.03.94
15	Youssef **AIT BENNASSER** (Mor)	(22) 07.07.96
20	Nacer **CHADLI** (Blg)	(29) 02.08.89
36	Sofiane **DIOP**	(18) 09.06.00
17	Aleksandr **GOLOVIN** (Rus)	(22) 30.05.96
7	Rony **LOPES** (Por)	(23) 28.12.95
6	Kevin **N'DORAM**	(22) 22.01.96
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(Ages as of 30.11.18)

Ferocious...Real Betis' Loren Moron competes with Roque Mesa (left) and Simon Kjaer of Sevilla this season

SEVILLA v REAL BETIS

The Andalusian derby may not be Spain's biggest game but it is by far the most ferocious

While *El Clasico* may be the main match in La Liga, the cities of Madrid and Barcelona are miles apart and neither Real or Barca take much in the way of support to their respective away games. For a far more intense, local affair you need to head down south to Seville.

With no love lost between neighbours Real Betis and Sevilla it, unfortunately, will come as no surprise to learn that recent encounters have been marred by such shocking incidents as Betis keeper Toni Prats being attacked on the pitch by a rival fan and Sevilla coach Juande Ramos knocked unconscious by a bottle thrown from the stands. Even the first meeting, way back in 1915, had to be abandoned after a pitch invasion by spectators.

Founded in 1890 by members of the city's British expat population, Sevilla beat Huelva Recreation 2-0 in the first official game to be played in Spain. But a split in the Sevilla ranks saw two directors leave and set up Betis FC in 1909. Five years later Betis merged with a student team, Sevilla Balompie, and on receiving royal patronage that same year they became Real Betis Balompie.

Although both clubs have one league title to their name – Betis were crowned champions 11 years before their rivals – Sevilla have enjoyed the far greater success. Not only have they lifted the Spanish Cup five times to Betis' two, they have also made a huge impact in Europe, winning the UEFA Cup twice, the UEFA Super Cup once and the Europa League three times in a row.

With more downs than ups over the years, Betis' defiance is best summed up by the club motto "*Viva el Betis manque pierda!*" ("Long live Betis even when they lose!") WS

Unconscious... Juande Ramos

CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS

1918 Mar 10
With several Betis players doing national service, it is said that their barracks were locked to prevent them playing against Sevilla in the Andalucia Cup. Forced to field a youth team, they were thrashed 22-0.

1935 Feb 3
The first top-flight clash saw Betis win 3-0 at Sevilla on their way to lifting the Spanish league title.

2014 Mar 20
Having lost 2-0 at home in the first leg of the Europa League round of 16, Sevilla won 2-0 at Betis in the return and went through 4-3 on penalties.

2018 Sep 2
Although Betis won 1-0 in the most recent meeting, Sevilla still lead 59-38 on head-to-head victories in official games, with 31 draws.

Europa...Sevilla's Jose Antonio Reyes celebrates scoring

ON BOTH SIDES

FRANCISCO ANTUNEZ
● 1941-45
● 1945-52

ANTONIO BARRIOS
● (coach) 1957-58, 1966-67, 1969-71
● (coach) 1961-63, 1967

LUIS ARAGONES
● 1961-64; (coach) 1981, 1997-98
● (coach) 1993-95

DIEGO RODRIGUEZ
● 1982-88
● 1988-96

JUANDE RAMOS
● (coach) 2001-02
● (coach) 2005-07

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We are now accepting orders for our new Yearbook of European Football, published to replace the European Football Yearbook. This book contains around 650 A4-sized pages and includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches played by the 55 UEFA countries with basic player info (name, date of birth, club) for those who appeared. For domestic football, it contains a historical list of champions and top scorers for each country, results of top division games and a final League table for the past season, information about each National Cup Final, player listings for top division clubs and other statistics. Also includes full statistics for the Champions & Europa Leagues 2017/2018. The book is scheduled for publication in late November 2018.

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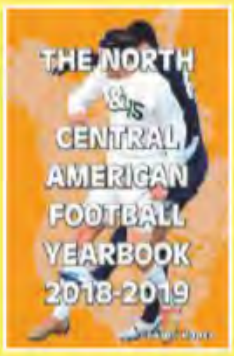

THE SOUTH AMERICAN FOOTBALL YEARBOOK 2018-2019

This 9th edition is a statistical yearbook of both domestic and international football in South America during the 2017-2018 season. Includes full line-ups and statistics for international matches played by CONMEBOL member countries together with basic player information (name, date of birth and club) for those who appeared in these games. For domestic football, this book contains a historical list of champions for each country, results of every League game and a final League table for the past season, information about each National Cup Final, player listings for top division clubs plus some other statistics. Finally, this book also includes full statistics for the Copa Libertadores 2017 and Copa Sudamericana 2017.

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